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Teaching the Sun as Simile: Bringing Nature into Language Arts Middle School Classrooms

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Teaching the Sun as Simile:
Bringing Nature into Language Arts Middle School Classrooms
by
Stormy Kage

A capstone project submitted in partial fulfillment of the
Requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Professional Writing in the Department of English

Kennesaw State University

In the College of Humanities and Social Sciences of Kennesaw State University
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Introduction

Portfolio Description

This portfolio, “Teaching the Sun as Simile: Bringing Nature into Language Arts Middle School Classrooms,” is a collection of my work in the Master of Arts in Professional Writing (MAPW) program and includes written pieces that explain and showcase how I, as an aspiring middle school English Language Arts (ELA) teacher, will use nature to teach writing/language arts to students. Due to the growing number of students with disabilities (SWD) who are part of general education classes, some pieces of the portfolio include how I will use nature to accommodate SWD in the writing pedagogy process as well. In this portfolio, inter-chapters are included to explain more in-depth each section of the portfolio and give insight on how and why the pieces of this portfolio fit together.

“Teaching the Sun as Simile: Bringing Nature into Language Arts Middle School Classrooms” emphasizes the interdisciplinary approach of teaching the sciences with the arts and humanities— specifically merging ecology and environmental sciences with language arts; explores the newer concepts of ecocriticism, ecoliteracy, and eco-composition (terms that will be defined in the first research essay); and expresses this approach through class schedules, a syllabus, lesson plans, activities, and a school gardening plan that cater to middle school language arts inclusion¹ classrooms. This portfolio exemplifies eco-composition, writing, and writing pedagogy from an ecological point of view, which includes producing written work as it relates to place, one’s surroundings, physical environment and/or the natural world.

¹ Inclusion classrooms are classes that teach both general education and special education students together.

The intended audience for this portfolio is mainly future school and/or school district employees who are interested in how I would approach teaching my classroom and other teachers who are interested in bringing nature into their ELA classrooms.

MAPW Course Competencies

Applied Writing

“Teaching the Sun as Simile: Bringing Nature into Language Arts Middle School Classrooms” utilizes applied writing techniques because it produces instructional documents that are not just meant for my audiences to read, but use.

As learned in my Technical Writing (PRWR 6240) course, one of the main aspects of applied/technical writing is condensing and interpreting complex information so that the intended audience understands the message that is being communicated. In my portfolio, I include lesson plans, assignments, instructions, a proposal, and other forms of communication that require me to condense and transform large amounts of complicated information into lessons that middle grade school children can understand and learn. My goal is to ensure I am creating documents that are comprehensible and easy-to-follow for my student, teacher, and K-12 education audiences by using the functions and theories of technical writers in the field.

Also, part of my portfolio includes a digital link to the lessons and activities presented in this document. I used Adobe Spark, design software that was introduced in my Document Design (PRWR 6550) course, to create the link. In this class, I also created a design philosophy that I will follow as a guide to inform my use of visual rhetoric to communicate with my audience.

Composition and Rhetoric

“Teaching the Sun as Simile: Bringing Nature into Language Arts Middle School Classrooms” relies on composition and rhetoric theory because the content is centered around

teaching composition. Many of the documents in the portfolio derived from the work I developed in my Composition and Rhetoric classes—Literacy Studies (PRWR 6650) and Teaching Writing in High School and Colleges (PRWR 6500). These courses have informed my portfolio the greatest in my secondary concentration of composition and rhetoric.

From the Literacy Studies (PRWR 6650) course, I used the following concepts/theories to draft my essay:

- Community Literacy – According to the Community Literacy Journal, community literacy is interdisciplinary and intersectional in nature, drawing from rhetoric and composition, communication, literacy studies, English studies, gender studies, race and ethnic studies, environmental studies, critical theory, linguistics, cultural studies, education, and more. My project is grounded in community literacy because it explores multidimensional aspects to budding writers and readers, with a focus on the environmental aspect of this theory.
- Research for Social Change – Concepts of research for social change is embedded in “Teaching the Sun as Simile” because it involves students researching for the purpose of making a social (or similarly, environmental) change within their community or schools and turning their research into some sort of action.
- Participatory Research – This is research that suggests that the people who create the knowledge are the intended audience for the knowledge. Students are encouraged to not just receive the knowledge from the teacher, but create their own knowledge through research, group work, applied projects and created experiences in the classroom.

From the Teaching Writing in High School and Colleges (PRWR 6500) course, I have learned how to scaffold and sequence lesson plans and courses for a writing class as well as different

teaching concepts such as: Writing across the curriculum, basic writing pedagogies, and collaborative writing.

Project Purpose

In April of 2019, I spoke with Denise Magee, the principal of Lindley Sixth Grade Academy in Cobb County, who told me her students perform the lowest in writing and they are looking for new ELA teachers who can properly teach the skill. In their 2019-2020 strategic plan, this school also listed “teaching writing across the STEAM disciplines” as one of their goals for next school year. As I began to explore the goals of the lowest performing middle schools in Cobb County, I saw similar needs. There is a need for multifaceted, innovative, and interdisciplinary writing curriculum.

The purpose of my project is to bring writing to life for students and connect the dots between language arts and the world around them, including the natural world. My project is a portfolio that I can use as an emerging ELA teacher to show future employers my strengths in lesson planning, writing pedagogy, and proposal and technical writing, as well as my action plans to foster diversity and invite fresh ideas, such as eco-composition, to interdisciplinary writing pedagogy in middle school classrooms.

Eco-composition is an important topic for English Language Arts (ELA) teachers to explore in their writing pedagogy practices for several reasons:

1. Teaches environmental issues like climate change, pollution, endangered species, sustainability, food scarcity, the human’s ecological footprint, etc.—important topics that often get overlooked compared to other trending topics.
2. Bridges the gap between the sciences and language, which is particularly important for a well-rounded, contextualized learning experience that does not limit students to the

boundaries of a subject in order to help them connect the dots and promote critical thinking across disciplines.

3. Implements great opportunities for project-based learning through real world projects/activities.
4. Expands the values of what is normally taught in an ELA classroom.
5. Offers different methods on how ELA can be taught.

Lastly, I am certified to teach middle school language arts as well as K-12 special education, so my project is geared toward the type of classrooms I will soon teach in—inclusion classrooms. In schools today, more general education classrooms also include students with disabilities. In fact, 58 percent of middle and high school students with disabilities will spend 80 percent of their school day within the general education class.² Over the last 25 years, there has been an increase in the inclusion of SWD into general education classrooms due to the belief general education classes offer a “less restrictive and socially just”³ environment.

I want to maintain a safe, comfortable environment in my classroom and meet the intellectual learning needs of all the students in my class. This project demonstrates to future employees that as an ELA teacher, I can also accommodate students with differences.

RESEARCH ESSAY

“Teaching the Sun as Simile: Bringing Nature into Language Arts Middle School Classrooms”

“Teaching the Sun as Simile” is an essay that explores an interdisciplinary approach to teaching middle school English Language Arts (ELA) by infusing nature and environmental studies. This essay defines concepts integral to new literacy studies and eco-criticism, literacy,

² Jade Wexler et.al, “Reading Comprehension and Co-Teaching Practices in Middle School English Language Arts Classrooms” *Exceptional Children* 84, no. 4 (July 2018): 384–02

³ Wexler, “Reading Comprehension and Co-Teaching Practices”, 384

and composition as it relates to ELA pedagogy. Also, it provides an explanation for the importance and relevance of using nature to develop an ecosystem of better readers, writers, and communicators in middle school classrooms.

Introduction

Students should know that the sun is a giant, radiant ball of gas and, at 27 million degrees Fahrenheit, it produces enough energy and light for our entire solar system⁴—without it, life on the planet Earth would not exist. However, this essay is not for science class—it is for language arts.

English Language Arts (ELA) is a mandatory subject in grade school because, at a minimum, it is a class that teaches students how to become better readers and writers. Most wouldn't argue that reading and writing are necessary life skills to be successful in today's society. In fact, these skills are needed more today than any other time in history. In her book *The Rise of Mass Writing*, Deborah Brandt mentions that regardless of their field of work, the average American spends 50 percent or more of their time at work engaging, creating, processing, and managing written communications. As a result, school districts are implementing more "Writing Across the Curriculum"⁵ initiatives, where students are encouraged to write more often in other subjects—social studies, math, and science—because it is an essential skill most will encounter even after graduation.

Through reading and writing, the best ELA teachers show students how to be great communicators, think critically, assess information, and problem solve; how to positively self-reflect, manage emotions, show compassion, argue reasonably with others, examine race,

⁴ Brian Dunbar. "The Sun" *NASA.gov*, (Aug. 2017), <https://www.weareteachers.com/writing-across-the-curriculum-what-how-and-why/>

⁵ Deva Dalporto, "Writing Across the Curriculum: What, How and Why", *weareteachers.com*, June 25, 2013, <https://www.weareteachers.com/writing-across-the-curriculum-what-how-and-why/>

culture, class, religion, gender and other social issues; how to stand up for what they believe in and relate to others. All in all, ELA teachers teach students about life, and this cannot be done if students are oblivious to the world, the environment, and the natural surroundings that impact their lives daily.

Because the major concerns around climate change, pollution, and animal and plant extinction are rising more than ever before, the young students of today will be the adult leaders of tomorrow, and the environmental state of the planet is an unavoidable conversation that our future leaders, as readers, writers, and communicators will have to address.

“Teaching the Sun as Simile” suggests that the Sun— a topic most likely learned about in a nature science class— can be related to, or a simile for, what can be also learned in ELA classrooms. If ELA teachers are to prepare students with such necessary skills for life, such as reading and writing, they cannot forget to integrate the teachings of the natural world too.

This essay will explore how ELA teachers can use nature and environmental studies to expound on past and current concepts of literacy and composition pedagogy as well as examine how it is beneficial for students if teachers of ELA integrate the teachings of nature into their lessons.

Background Information: ELA Instruction

Before explaining nature’s role in English Language Arts (ELA), it is best to first define what exactly ELA is. ELA instruction gained professional recognition from early childhood educators in the 1950s as distinguished separately from the more traditional English class. English was exclusive, a subject taught in isolation of other academic subjects, with focus mainly on the practical skills of writing, reading, grammar, language, and literature. In contrast, ELA was constructed in a broader scope, a form of humanities, to teach English as an artform through a combination of skill and contextual experience. For an example, if the assignment is to write a

letter, English class would teach students the skill of how to properly format a letter— name and address at the top left, date below the address, leave blank line space after the date, etc. An ELA class would approach letter writing not only by teaching the skill of how to format the letter, but also its meaning, use and writer’s experience —the role of letter writing in society, the reason for writing the letter, the experience of submitting it and the desired outcome, and how to write for specific audiences etc.

Though English classes today can be just as diverse and inclusive as ELA classes, ELA spearheaded the concept of teaching English as not only a skill, but an experience. Typically, in education today, English courses are taught at the high school and college level, but ELA is also taught in elementary and middle school grades.

To compartmentalize ELA, in 1996 The International Reading Association and the National Council of Teachers of English created the “Standards for the English Language Arts”⁶ and has since defined ELA by its different mediums in parts: 1. Written Language - reading and writing 2. Spoken Communication- listening and speaking and 3. Visual Language - viewing and visually representing.”

Literacy Studies

It is no longer enough to just teach a child how to read, write a paragraph, spell a word and call it literacy. This is not to say those are not fine examples of what literacy is, but it can be and is much more than simply reading and writing, as traditional definitions would describe it. Literacy scholars today are broadening the outdated definition of literacy with concepts such as the New Literacy Studies (NLS). Coined by James Paul Gee, NLS argues that “literacy [is] something people [do] in the world and in society, not just inside their heads, and should be

⁶ Richard Nordquist, “What are the Language Arts”, thoughtco.com, Dotdash Publishing, Feb. 8, 2019, <https://www.thoughtco.com/what-are-language-arts-1691214>

studied as such ...thus, it [is] argued, literacy should be studied in an integrated way in its full range of contexts and practices, not just cognitive, but social, cultural, historical, and institutional.”⁷ NLS states literacy is something one does—it is an action, and since many times our actions involve other people, it turns into a social involvement of continued verbal, bodily, written, read, watched and listened communication. For example, if I were to read an article about the many (arguably) successful 2018 teacher protests that took place across the United States from West Virginia to Arizona over lack of adequate salary and benefits, the reading aspect would be considered utilizing my literary skills in its traditional sense.

However, if I finished the article and felt so inspired to rally up all the teachers in my community to protest and march to the capitol, that entire process (from gaining the mental confidence to rally, to sending out letters, flyers and social media posts, to persuading other teachers to join in, to buying protest t-shirts, signs and banners, to speaking to the media reporters who want to cover the rally on the local news, to calling my mother and telling her about it all, etc.) and the actual social impact I would have made, is what NLS does not want anyone to overlook in terms of what literacy is. Or maybe, I could have just read the same article, told an 8th grade student about what I read and planted a seed in his/her/their mind that inspired the student to apply for a major in education five years later—that is literacy too.

That is literacy too because each of the mentioned outcomes all evolved from a literacy event. A literary event was first defined in 1993 by literary scholar Shirley Brice Heath as “being any occasion in which a written text is involved in a social interaction.”⁸ Expanding on that

⁷ James Paul Gee, “The New Literary Studies”, *The Routledge Handbook of Literary Studies* (2015), 35

⁸ Mary Hamilton, “The Social Context of Literacy”: 9, https://www.academia.edu/28611030/The_social_context_of_literacy_Understanding_literacy_in_its_social_context

definition, I'd like to not limit the occasion to only written text, but all forms of communication,⁹ including anything from speaking to digital media. Whenever there is a message being conveyed, literacy is involved and just how well students can convey and understand the message is one of the many the responsibilities of ELA teachers today.

Furthermore, according to adult literacy professor, Mary Hamilton, "to be effective teachers, we need to understand this 'more' – how skills are shaped by the social contexts, purposes and relationships within which reading and writing are used."¹⁰ This is to say, different students are going to have different social and cultural contexts in which they engage in literacy as well as differing reasons as to why and how they do, and that must be respected. It is important to keep in mind that this means there is no one right way to look at literacy. "If we see literacy as a form of situated social practice, we do not need to search for one true definition of literacy. We can accept that different purposes for literacy exist,"¹¹ and if different purposes for literacy exists, ELA educators must be open to the idea of expanding the ways literacy is taught.

Literacy + Nature

The interconnectedness of literacy, as described in NLS, allows for educators to link literacy studies to nature. The science of ecology, which is a branch of biology, is the study of how organisms interact with one another and with their physical environment¹² as well as how organisms, populations and communities affect the surrounding environment.¹³ This scientific

⁹ It is important to understand, for this paper and within the concept of NLS, literacy is not only about writing and reading, but all other forms of communication such as speaking, drawing, dancing, video, audio, etc. Though it may often be referred to by its reading and writing components, keep it mind not to limit literacy to only these actions.

¹⁰ Mary Hamilton "The Social Context of Literacy", 7

¹¹ Hamilton, "The Social Context", 9

¹² Khan Academy, "What is Ecology", <https://www.khanacademy.org/science/biology/ecology/intro-to-ecology/a/what-is-ecology>

¹³ Dobrin, Sidney I., Weisser, Christian R., *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), 17

approach to ecology is very similar to the ecological approach to literacy and composition¹⁴ as well. For a brief account of events, literacy studies have transformed from product, to process, to post-process or place- based writing/reading studies¹⁵. At the beginning of literacy and composition education, much focus was given to the product outcome (i.e., the paper that was written, the book that was read). Scholars and educators realized that there was more to literacy studies and eventually transitioned to a process approach which involves considering each step readers and writers take to produce the product (i.e., taking notes, outlining, drafting, editing, etc.) or engage with it.¹⁶ However, since the early-to mid-1980's, literacy and composition studies has had a new paradigm shift and entered what is called the post-process or place-based period.¹⁷ The post-process approach involved looking beyond the individual writer or reader's process and into the larger ecosystems that the individual is part of. Therefore:

Composition began to examine the environments in which writers write under the rubrics of culture, class, gender, race, and identity. Identifying these larger influential "systems," afforded teachers of writing the opportunities to teach definable, codifiable systems as "conceptual schemes" that dominate discourse production. That is, composition turned toward issues of social construction, of race, of gender, of culture, of identity, in order to better understand both how external social constructs affect writers, and how, in turn, writers impact those same discursively constructed critical

¹⁴ I include composition studies, which focuses more explicitly on writing rather than reading, because it is part of literacy studies and I will further explain the difference in the next sections.

¹⁵ Marilyn Cooper "The Ecology of Writing", *College English* 48, no. 4 (Apr. 1986): 364

¹⁶ Cooper, "The Ecology of Writing", 364

¹⁷ Dobrin, Sidney I., Weisser, Christian R., *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition*, 17

categories. In essence, composition did not just make a move post-process, composition made a move into ecology.¹⁸

When simply defined, teaching literacy consists largely of teaching reading and writing. When combining literacy studies with ecology, however, the term is considered ecoliteracy and thus, ecoliteracy teaches largely ecocriticism (ecology merging with reading) and ecocomposition (ecology merging with writing).¹⁹ I will further explain each term in the next subsections below, but first consider this: ecoliteracy is no different than the other critical theories of race, gender, class, religion, culture, etc. that are commonly found in language arts curriculum and throughout literature study. We teach our students these critical theories to become more well-rounded and knowledgeable about the different people, ethnicities and communities in the world. The concept of ecoliteracy is to make sure we not only use language arts to teach about relationships with people, but place as well.

Ecocriticism

Defined by Cheryll Glotfelty in 1996, ecocriticism is the study of the relationship between literature and the physical environment.²⁰ One of the most obvious ways to study this type of literature is to read news, articles or stories that discuss the physical environment. Have students read “green” about ways to conserve energy, recycle, planting flowers or reusing scraps. “Through reading green, we might begin to invest our attentions toward the central insights of ecology—that everything is connected—and help students learn compelling motives for thinking beyond ourselves toward rebuilding our relationships with the planet.”²¹

¹⁸ Dobrin, Sidney I., Weisser, Christian R., *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition*, 17

¹⁹ Lauren G. McClanahan, “The Greening of the Language Arts: Considering Sustainability Outside of the Science Classroom”, *Journal of Sustainability Education* (Jan. 2013): sec. “Ecocomposition, Ecoliteracy, and the ‘Greening’ of English”

²⁰ Cheryll Glotfelty, “Introduction: Literary studies in an age of Environmental Crisis”, in *The Ecocriticism Reader*, xviii, Edited by Glotfelty, C. & Fromm, H., Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 1996

²¹ Heather Bruce, “Greening English”, *English Journal* 100, no. 10(2011):17

However, the approach to ecocriticism is not only limited to text about the physical environment whatsoever. Glotfelty states “just as feminist criticism examines language and literature from a gender-conscious perspective, and Marxist criticism brings an awareness of modes of production and economic class to its reading of texts, ecocriticism takes an earth-centered approach to literary studies.”²²

This may make one consider many of their favorite stories and books in order to reinterpret it from an ecocritical point-of-view. For example, the classic short story “The Short Happy Life of Francis Macomber” by Ernest Hemingway, a story that was constantly part of the lesson when I was in grade school and even as a freshman in college, comes to mind. A brief synopsis: This is a story about a wealthy, well-groomed married couple, Margaret and Francis Macomber, who went on a safari in Nairobi with hunting guide Robert Wilson, a rugged, “manly-man.” Throughout the story Margaret was constantly picking on her husband for being a sissy and not being manly enough to hunt and kill the lion. Margaret was so fed up with her husband, and yet so attracted to the manly hunting guide that one late night she decided to have an affair with Wilson. Finally, when Francis decided to gain some courage, he hunted and shot a buffalo. Thinking he killed the buffalo, he was overjoyed and ecstatic, but the buffalo was still alive. Everyone took turns taking shots at the buffalo, while Margaret somehow “accidentally” killed Francis.

When most critics analyze and address the themes of this classic short story, they mention topics like men and masculinity, femininity, courage, or the values of marriage. However, when approaching this story from an ecocritical point-of-view, questions about the character’s environment should arise. *What role does nature play in this story?* These characters

²² Bruce, “Greening English”, 17

were in Kenya, a country that banned hunting nearly 40 years after the story was written. *How was hunting viewed in the story then? How did hunting affect the story's environment? The characters? How do you think the lions and buffalos felt in the story after being hunted? How do you feel about the lion and buffalo being hunted? How is nature represented in this story? Was it held in high regard? Or treated with little concern?* These are among some of the questions to reflect.

To give another, more contemporary, example, *The Hate U Give* by first time novelist Angie Thomas was a pretty big success in 2017. I saw a plethora of middle school girl's eye's glued to the pages of this book and by 2018 this best seller turned into a movie played in major theaters.

In brief, without spoiling the story, this book is about a high school junior named Starr who grew up and lived in a poverty-stricken area of the slums, known as Garden Heights, that was predominately African American. Her parents wanted her to get the best education that she could so they would drive her further out into the wealthy neighborhoods to attend Williamson High in the predominately Caucasian neighborhood. Amongst tackling the subject of police brutality, a major part of the story, Starr constantly battled with feeling like she had two identities: on one hand she had to "act Black" when she was in Garden Heights, but on the other hand she had to "act White" when she was at Williamson High.

The questions around analyzing race, culture and identity are evident constantly throughout this book and those type of questions should be asked to students if assigned to review this book. Though, ecocriticism would include another approach to analyzing. A great activity to help students think ecocritically about this book is to ask them to draw what they think the Garden Heights neighborhood looks like and what the Williamson neighborhood looks like

and have them compare aloud. *What role do these environments play in the story? Can you identify these types of environments in your real life? Which environment do you think Starr relates better to and why? How do each of these environments affect Starr's personality? What is environmental racism and how is it represented in the story?* These are among some of the questions to reflect.

Ecocriticism is a fairly new approach to studying, teaching, and engaging with literacy. Therefore, it may be that many writers/content producers do not even consider the environment or nature when drafting their stories so critics may have to dig a little deeper, but the point is that the environment and the world around us inevitably plays a major part in our everyday lives and the lives of the characters we read about.

Ecocomposition

While ecocriticism is largely about ways to interpret text, ecocomposition is largely about producing texts. This includes writing in the most traditional sense, as well as other forms of visual and natural text.²³ When teaching ecocomposition, there are two different concepts to approach the lesson: ecological literacy and discursive ecology.²⁴

Ecological literacy is the most common and most well-known way to teach ecocomposition. This consists of asking students to be critically conscious of their work while constructing genre or subject focused material. For instance, writing in the genre of nature writing. Nature writing is “a form of creative nonfiction in which the natural environment (or a narrator's encounter with the natural environment) serves as the dominant subject.”²⁵ Often

²³ McClanahan, “The Greening of the Language Arts”, sec. “Ecocomposition, Ecoliteracy, and the ‘Greening’ of English”

²⁴ Sidney I. Dobrin, Christian R. Weisser, *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition*, 115

²⁵ Richard Nordquist, “What is Nature Writing?”, thoughtco.com

times nature writing involves some sort of serene, wildlife, rural, or landscape picturesque setting that is ecological by intent and supports a conservationist agenda.

Authors such as Rachel Carson, Gilbert White, Aldo Leopold, Henry David Thoreau and John Muir are some of America's most celebrated nature writers.²⁶ Educating students on this style of writing and then asking them to write a story within the nature-writing genre would engage the students in ecological literacy. Or, another way to engage in ecological literacy would not be to focus on a particular genre that supports environmentalism, but to write about environmentalism as the subject. For example, having students write an essay on global warming or pollution in the oceans would help them become more environmentally aware in their writing.²⁷

The discursive ecology approach to teaching ecocomposition requires a bit more of an intricate understanding of the writing process. Not to say it is a better way to approach ecocomposition pedagogy, but a more advanced way that should probably be consequential to the ecological literacy lessons, in most cases.²⁸ The fundamental of this approach is understanding that writing is not a result of ecology, but it *is* ecological. It is thought that “the most progressive and dynamic forms of ecocomposition urge students to look at their own discursive acts as being inherently ecological. The study of nature writing may lend to helping individuals to think more ecologically, but we must also help students to see communication, writing, and the production of knowledge as ecological endeavors.”²⁹

A way to think about writing as an ecological endeavor is to consider the ecosystem involved in producing a piece of written work: “The idea that a text belongs naturally and

²⁶ For a list of 2018 Nature Writing books from the Chicago Review of Books visit: <https://chireviewofbooks.com/2018/07/16/best-nature-writing-of-2018-so-far/>

²⁷ Sidney I. Dobrin, Christian R. Weisser, *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition*, 115

²⁸ Sidney I. Dobrin, Christian R. Weisser, *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition*, 115

²⁹ Sidney I. Dobrin, Christian R. Weisser, *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition*, 117

uniquely to the person who writes it has been the much criticized over time for romancing writers, masking the collaborative nature of writing, and impoverishing the cultural commons.”³⁰ It is so common for many, both students of composition and even professionals, to acquire an egotistical, self-righteous and individualistic attitude toward their writing, bypassing the fact that nothing is ever written (or said, or thought, for that matter) without the countless amount of assistance of someone and/or something else.

For an example of the ecosystem of writing, I probably would have never written a paper about ecoliteracy if I did not pick up a book on ecoliteracy; I would have never picked up a book on ecoliteracy if I did not plant my own garden; and I would have never planted my own garden if I did not major in Human Services where I learned about food deserts, agriculture, and food sustainability for the many people in this country who go hungry, and I would have never majored in Human Services if I decided to not listen to my mother and not obtain my bachelor’s degree and so on and so forth. Here, I present a series of literacy events, a spider web of proceedings, a network of interconnected interactions with both people and the natural world over a span of eight years that lead up to writing this one paper. I did not write this paper alone, but every encounter and experience since then, including the rainy days and the days the hornworms ate my tomatoes, influenced why I present “Teaching the Sun as Simile.”

Even if the subject of the writing does not directly relate to the natural world, the environment plays a part in the ecocomposition process. Consider that ecocomposition and all of its interconnectedness is truly a study of relationships and this includes “relationships between individual writers and their surrounding environments, relationships between writers and texts, relationships between texts and culture, between ideology and discourse, between language and

³⁰ Deborah Brandt, *The Rise of Writing*, 19

the world.”³¹ Environments should be thought of broadly to embrace “classroom environments, political environments, electronic environments, ideological environments, historical environments, economic environments and natural environments.”³² Students can see this broad and varied, yet intricate ecosystem of writing because everything around us is writing and writing is in everything.

Why Does Teaching Ecoliteracy Matter?

More than any other time in history, environmental issues are increasing. It is starting to become the norm to wake-up to global warming, pollution, deforestation, animal and plant extinction, overpopulation, etc. These problems are constantly popping up in headlines and somehow, in a subject that is supposed to bring awareness to many societal and worldly critical issues, many language arts classrooms are not initiating these types of environmental conversations. Teaching ecoliteracy matters because, “by tackling issues of environmental degradation (or, conversely, celebration), English Language Arts can focus on how humans are affected by human action and on how the whole of biota (including, but not favoring, humans) is affected.”³³ Considering traditional literature is taught from a human-centered point of view, distinguished professor and environmentalist David Orr reminds many through his work on ecological literacy that environmental sustainability is about human survival too. Educators cannot continue to ignore these ever-growing environmental issues and by incorporating ecoliteracy practices, students can grow to not only be more environmentally conscious, but more thoughtful and worldly writers and readers.

Putting Teaching Ecoliteracy into Practice

³¹ Sidney I. Weisser, Christian Weisser, *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition*, 9

³² Sidney I. Weisser, Christian Weisser, *Natural Discourse: Toward Ecocomposition*, 9

³³ Lauren G. McClanahan, “The Greening of the Language Arts: Considering Sustainability Outside of the Science Classroom”, *Journal of Sustainability Education* 4 (Jan. 2013)

Up until now, I have discussed theories and concepts of ecoliteracy. I want to now focus attention on ways educators can incorporate ecoliteracy into an ELA curriculum using more familiar literacy pedagogy theories so that it will make bridging the gap between nature and literacy more accessible. The K-12 public school curriculum in the United States can be a bit rigid and narrow and “[if you] closely examine any middle or high school curriculum, you will readily find many topics being formally studied: chemistry, algebra, civics, literature and the like. However, what you won’t readily find is any meaningful connection between them, as often they are treated as separate entities, existing in a vacuum, not simultaneously acting or being acted upon.”³⁴ Connecting these subjects so that a more interdisciplinary approach to learning occurs may require a paradigm shift within the way much of K-12 curriculum is designed and instructed, however in the subsections below, I offer support for an integration of literacy and ecology. The suggestions below are activities that are meant to spark creativity when teaching ecoliteracy and are by no means unadaptable.

Research for Social Change

Part of talking about environmental issues comes from a place that cares about the environment and does not want to harm it and, language arts can work to express that care and those particular issues. Researching for social change is to teach students and remind educators that none of it is done in vain because writers are meant to inspire, and readers are meant to be inspired to take action. Therefore, “for some [research for social change] means finding new ways of looking at what is familiar in order to change it. For others it may begin as a need for a better understanding of changes forced on the situations in which they find themselves.”³⁵

³⁴ Lauren G. McClanahan, “The Greening of the Language Arts”

³⁵ Lauren G. McClanahan, “The Greening of the Language Arts”

Have students research around their school or community for environmental issues that affect them or, if not that advanced, introduce them to it; maybe there is too much wasting of food in the cafeteria or no one is recycling at school. Whatever it may be, get them to identify, research and communicate the issue for the purpose of making real change in their environments. If, for example, the school is not recycling, have students create a campaign to promote recycling and evaluate its effectiveness. Claudia Mitchell and Casey Burkholder created guidelines to practice research for social change that include four checkpoints:³⁶

1. Ask ‘*what difference does this make?*’

Make sure that students are researching real issues that have realistic goals for an opportunity to make a real difference.

2. Does the method fit?

Consider what method students will use to deliver their environmental issue as a message. Is the best method through use of video or text or voice-over, etc. and why?

3. Access to technologies

Using technology is essential in twenty-first century classrooms and is truly the future of communication and language arts.³⁷ Plus, in most public-school curriculum it is now a requirement to include technology in the learning process. Consider having children use social media, PowerPoints, Adobe Creative Cloud, and other professional software.

4. Sustainability

Consider how the effects of the social research are long lasting. Don’t just have students do this research, implement a change, and then next school year the change is no longer

³⁶ Claudia Mitchell, Casey Burkholder, “Literacies and Research as Social Change”, *The Routledge Handbook of Literacy Studies* (Routledge Publishing, 2015) chapt. 43

³⁷ Anna Small Rosebora, *Teaching Middle School Language Arts*, (Lanham, Maryland: The Rowman & Littlefield Publishing Group, Inc., 2010)

in effect or relevant. Have students come up with a plan to make sure their hard work is sustainable.

Place-Based Writing

Place-based writing will allow students to think more thoughtfully about their surroundings, including the role they play in their environment, as well as the role their environment plays in their lives. Place-based writing is:

The process of using the local community and environment as a starting point to teach concepts in language arts...and other subjects across the curriculum. Emphasizing hands-on, real-world learning experiences, this approach to education increases academic achievement, helps students develop stronger ties to their community, enhances students' appreciation for the natural world, and creates a heightened commitment to serving as active, contributing citizens.³⁸

An activity on how to incorporate place-based writing in the ELA classroom is to ask students to write a story where the setting is their neighborhood, favorite local store or hangout spot, their home, or any setting that they may spend quality time and are comfortable with. However, tell them to write the story without using any human characters. This activity will force them to think beyond themselves and the state of their natural surroundings, making for a much more environmentally centered approach to writing.

Community Literacy

³⁸ David Sobel, *Place-Based Education: Connecting Classroom and Community* (Great Barrington, MA: The Orion Society, 2004) 7

Community literacy involves allowing students to work together as a community for the benefits of their community. According to Linda Flower:

community literacy is a rhetorical practice for inquiry and social change. Seen in its educational context, it, like other forms of critical literacy, is the heir to John Dewey's vision of progressive education, in which people learn things by a hands-on experiential and strenuously intellectual engagement with the world. We learn, Dewey argued, through active experimentation and reflection—approaching topics from science and technology to language and history as problem posers and problem-solvers. Taking an experimental stance to both received ideas and our own experience, we do not merely acquire knowledge; we make it through the process of inquiry.³⁹

The issue with this is oftentimes that students do not see “the community” amongst themselves. Many students have their own cliques or groups that they only associate with and do not make the effort to find similarities between themselves and all their peers. Considering the many ecosystems and the interconnectedness of ecoliteracy, community literacy would be an excellent way to intermingle literacy practices and environmentalism. An example of how to do this is through dialectic culture circles⁴⁰.

Have students sit in a circle and ask questions about one another's environmental upbringing. Questions such as: *What is your favorite place to visit on weekends and why? How*

³⁹ Linda Flower, *Community Literacy and the Rhetoric of Public Engagement*, (Southern Illinois University Press, 2008)16

⁴⁰ Linda Flower, “Community Literacy”, 16

does it make you feel to be in that place? How do you feel when you're outside in nature? What places frighten you and why? How do you think your environment influences your personality or choices? What are some things you love and hate about your environment/community/neighborhood and why? This practice will allow students to connect with their peers and develop relationships over their environments and surroundings.

Typically, “community literacy depends on the social ethic and strategic practice of intercultural rhetoric to:”⁴¹

1. Draw out the voices of the silenced and the expertise of marginalized people (as well as places);
2. Draw people normally separated by difference into new roles as partners in inquiry;
3. Recognize and use difference in the service of discovery and change, transforming rather than erasing its conflicts and contradictions.

Conclusion

It is my hope that *Teaching the Sun as Synonym* provides an introductory account for bridging the gap between nature and literacy. With an intended focus on middle school grades, I present this paper and my portfolio to all who have an interest in broadening and transforming the way ELA is taught in standard public-school curricula. By bridging the gap between nature and literacy, it allows students to grow into multifaceted, worldly critical thinkers who know how to make change, and learn the benefits of community—the ecosystems of life.

⁴¹ Linda Flowers, “Community Literacy”, 20

INTER-CHAPTER

Teaching Statement

“Teaching the Sun as Simile: Bringing Nature into Language Arts Middle School Classrooms,” the essay, was written in my first year in the MAPW program for Literacy Studies PRWR 6650. This essay chapter explored the theories of eco-criticism and introducing nature, place, and environmentalism into ELA middle school pedagogy. The following chapters will focus more on how “Teaching the Sun as Simile” can be used in the classroom, but first, I have included a chapter dedicated to my teaching philosophy in the form of a teaching statement.

My teaching statement discusses the values and philosophies I will bring into my classroom. Though this statement does not directly address bringing nature into middle school classrooms, it aids my portfolio because future hiring principals will want to know my philosophical approach to how I teach my class. According to Concordia University Portland’s teaching site, “Teachers who perform with a purpose will find themselves more focused, rejuvenated and excited. Through the various highs and lows, a teaching philosophy or “mission statement” helps an educator stay true to one’s core beliefs.⁴²” Also, I believe my teaching statement personalizes an approach to teaching and will allow my future school employer, students, and parents an opportunity to learn more about me.

TEACHING STATEMENT

Community

During my studies in Uganda, working with children and local nonprofit organizations, one of the lessons I learned was through the term “Ubuntu”. I watched children who went hungry receive their one-meal-a-day not even think to take a bite until they first shared portions of their

⁴² “What is a Teaching Philosophy Statement and Why do I Need it?” Room 241: A Blog by Concordia University-Portland, <https://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/admissions-tips/what-is-a-teaching-philosophy-statement-and-why-do-i-need-it/>

meal with their neighbors. They lived by and valued Ubuntu, which translates to *I am because you are*— in other words, we are all connected; our existence as individuals depends on the existence of others.

- **For my students:** I bring this value to my practice because I want my students to know that they are part of a positive community and they are not alone. When they enter my class, and even when they leave, we are all a team. I want my students to enter an environment where they know they can count on me and their peers for support, encouragement and guidance.
- **In the classroom:** Students sit at tables, instead of individual desks to foster a sense of togetherness; students are given assignments that involve understanding and interacting with their peers and other members of society; the value of community is not restricted to the human community, but also the ecological community so students will have multiple opportunities to engage with nature and the natural environment.
- **For myself:** I make a commitment to engage and create a communal safe space for my students. I will not limit my students' access to a community only to the class, but engage with a network of professionals, organizations, and opportunities within the school, the local community neighborhoods and even the global community around the world as well.

Culture

The first time I went to IHOP was when my parents took me and my sister at 8- and 9-years-old. We were driving back home to Georgia after visiting relatives in Ohio and decided to stop for breakfast in a small town on the outskirts of Louisville, Kentucky. I had never waited so long for my food to not be served. I sat there, waiting patiently, glancing around the crowded

restaurant. The more I glanced, the more I realized that everyone was intensely staring back at me. The more I looked, the more I realized everyone else already had their pancakes. The more I looked, the more I started to feel uncomfortable. I asked my mom why everyone was staring at our table. She looked at me and said, “Because we’re the only Black people in here.”

- **For my students:** I bring this value to my practice because I want my students to know that no matter their race, ethnicity, nationality, ability, physicality, gender, beliefs, upbringing, etc. my classroom is a place where they are more than welcomed. They will never be made to feel like they do not belong regardless of their cultural background.
- **In the classroom:** There are bookshelves filled with books written by and about diverse groups of people; my lessons will inform and expose students to different groups of people from different cultures; we will celebrate cultural day; we will deepen and embrace understanding our own culture; we will discuss current topics as it relates to cultural and societal events that affect them
- **For myself:** I make a commitment to discuss issues of race, class, gender, etc. with my students because I know these are topics that are often ignored in grade school, but deeply effect the students I serve. I will respect all student’s beliefs and backgrounds and encourage students to embrace their culture, as well as introduce them to the cultures of others. I understand culture, not only in terms of race and ethnicity, but in terms of family upbringing as well as individual differences.

Confidence

I went from being the extremely shy girl who ran out the room crying every time the teacher made me talk in front of the class, to leading a group of junior sailors through a fire on a

burning ship in the middle of a war zone during my service in the U.S. Navy—not because I wish I couldn’t call it quits and run off the boat in tears, but because I had no choice.

- **For my students:** I bring this value to my practice because my students have no choice but to excel, both in my class and in their personal lives. As their teacher, it is my job to give them the tools to do so. Often students do not lack the ability, but the motivation and the confidence in themselves to rise above all odds or obstacles. My students may have to step outside of their comfort-zone, and I will academically and intellectually challenge my students, but it is through those challenges they will grow and be able to think critically, independently, and confidently for themselves.
- **In the classroom:** Positive self-affirmations is a daily routine in my class; there is a zero-tolerance policy for bullying, shaming or picking on others in my class and it is strictly prohibited; my students will be treated as the young adults they are growing to be, not babies; I acknowledge and praise my students for all their accomplishments.
- **For myself:** I make a commitment to advocate for my students; to speak up for them even if no one else will, despite my inner “shy girl”; to empower, encourage, and build them up, never tear them down.

Continued Education

My first civilian job was as a journalist working for a county newspaper. At that time, I had no college degree and no formal or professional training as a writer. All I had was a dream of being a journalist and a bunch of writing books that I studied. The Editor-in-Chief of the newspaper hired me the day of the interview. Of course, she assigned me all the news articles no one else on the staff wanted to write, but it did not matter to me because she had given me the opportunity to fulfill my dreams. Later, when I asked her why she gave me the job, she told me it

was because out of all the college-educated students she interviewed, I was the only person familiar with the popular Strunk and White's *The Elements of Style* grammar book.

- **For my students:** I bring this value to my practice because I want my students to know that the knowledge they acquire is something no one can take away from them and to continue to educate themselves, even if self-taught, because the more they know, the more they can achieve.
- **In the classroom:** I will encourage my students to deepen their knowledge on their own by having them research topics of their choosing and report on it for low stakes writing assignments.
- **For myself:** I am committed to continuing to learn and advance my knowledge in my field so that I can be a better teacher for my students.

INTER-CHAPTER

Nature Writing in the Classroom

My teaching statement includes the values and purposes for why I teach, and it will be the underlying force that drives me whenever I create lessons or am in front of the classroom. After learning about who I am as a teacher, the following documents are used in this portfolio to showcase examples of how I would incorporate nature into ELA middle school classrooms through a syllabus, course schedule, and lessons and activities.

1. Syllabus

The syllabus serves as a contract and demonstrates how I will structure my language arts classroom and what students and parents should expect. It delineates responsibilities between the students and me as well as outlines classroom procedures. Stated in the syllabus, there is a focus on an interdisciplinary approach to the class, including the sciences. This syllabus was adopted by the Atlanta Public School System and modified to

meet my classroom's needs. Though most syllabi are created by each school's subject department, this syllabus serves as a sample and indicator to future school employees that I understand classroom policies and procedures.

2. Course Schedule

This schedule shows a 13-week unit on nature writing, that I will incorporate into my class. It shows the schedule of what nature writing and reading assignments are to be done that week and due dates, indicated in yellow highlights. This indicates to future employers that I have a well-thought out plan for my lessons.

3. Lesson Plans and Activities

The lesson plans show more in depth of what and how I will teach nature writing daily.

The lesson plans are scaffolded and sequenced in an order that I deem most suitable to teach the content. The lesson plans are also aligned with the GA Language Arts

Standards, so it shows future employers that I am knowledgeable about state curriculum and I can align my nature writing lessons with what is required by the state of Georgia.

The activities are geared around different approaches to nature writing and include instructions and a grading scale.

SYLLABUS



6th Grade Language Arts Course Syllabus Lovejoy Middle School 2019-2020

Ms. Stormy Kage	
Team 6-1	Room #201
skage@cobb.k12.ga.us	
Tutorial: Monday afternoon (3:45-4:45)	

While email is the preferred method of communication, teachers may also be reached by school phone.

Class Description: This language arts class is designed to increase your communications skills through reading, writing, speaking, and the study of the English language. Our primary focus in language arts class will be mastery of different writing styles, demonstration of the rules of grammar, and the ability to express yourself orally.

This year you can expect to read a variety of fiction and non-fiction including short stories, dramas, poetry, essays and current events. These writing pieces will model the different writing styles we will be working on ourselves. Writing assignments will include timed responses, journal writing, essays, and creative pieces. Vocabulary, spelling, and grammar assignments will also be an important part of this class. A large focus of my class is on interdisciplinary studies, which means that we will incorporate other subjects, such as history and science, into our language arts work. Because we are a community of learners, please also expect to work periodically in group situations and to present information to your peers in groups or individually.

Our major units of study will include but are not limited to:

- Narrative writing*
- Expository writing (descriptive, explanation, comparison and contrast, problem/solution)
*
- Technical writing (friendly letters, thank-you notes, instructions, web pages) *
- Persuasive writing/Speech writing and delivery*
- Poetry
- Short stories
- Mythology/Folklore
- Sentence Fluency and Construction
- Vocabulary
- Standard grammar and mechanics

*Throughout all our writing, we will also utilize a multi-step writing process to develop, revise, evaluate, and improve our products. In our course of study in all the units, we will address the various elements of specific genres (including but not limited to organization, purpose, audience, narration, conflict, sound, graphics, tone, and theme).

Infinite Campus: You can see your up-to-date class average at any time on the Infinite Campus website. Your parents must obtain a username and password from the main office. Check this site often to see if you are missing assignments in Language Arts.

Homework Hero:

Teachers use www.homeworkhero.com to keep students and parents updated on daily/weekly homework assignments. From the Homework Hero home page, simply click on Assignments, choose GA, find Inman Middle School, and search for your teacher's name. PLEASE NOTE: Homework Hero will only be used for the first semester.

Lovejoy Middle School website:

After we are done using Homework Hero, we will use the new APS site, <http://srt3.atlantapublicschools.us/inman/site/default.asp>. You will be able to access class announcements and handouts on this site.

Grading Policy:

In our class, you will be graded informally and formally each day, using several different types of assessments. Here is the breakdown:

Homework – 15%

Quizzes- 15%

Tests- 20%

Projects- 20%

Classwork- 30%

Required Materials:

*1” Binder

*Independent reading book

*5 Dividers

*Notebook paper

*Writing Utensils (Black/blue pens or mechanical pencils are required.)

Returned Work:

All work will be graded and returned in-class every Friday. I will allow a while longer for lengthier writing assignments, and those due dates will be given ahead of time. Students will have an opportunity to review their graded work, and then they will be asked to file the assignments into their class portfolios. Portfolios are used to gauge student progress throughout the year. **Assignments:** All assignments must be submitted by the given due date and are due at the beginning of the class period, unless otherwise stated. All homework is due the next day unless otherwise stated.

Late Assignments/Missed Work: Any assignments not received on or before the due date are considered late. In order to receive credit for any missed assignments, students must have an excusable absence, tardy, or early dismissal. It is the student's responsibility to check with the teacher regarding any late/missed assignments and their due date.

Cheating/Plagiarism

Cheating and/or plagiarism will not be tolerated and will result in an automatic grade of zero. This includes copying homework, classwork, test answers, talking during a test or quiz, allowing someone to copy your work, and trying to pass off someone else's work as your own.

Parents, please fill out the attached slip and return it to your child's Language Arts teacher by August 16, 2020.

Thanks very much!

Ms. Kage

Parents/Guardians:

I have read the Syllabus for the sixth-grade Language Arts Class, and I understand the course's grading policy, homework policy, intended units of study, required notebook organization, and items that my child must bring in daily to be prepared.

Parent/Guardian signature:

Child's name:

Date: _____

Parents/Guardians:

I have read the Syllabus for the sixth-grade Language Arts Class, and I understand the course's grading policy, homework policy, intended units of study, required notebook organization, and items that my child must bring in daily to be prepared.

Parent/Guardian signature:

COURSE SCHEDULE

Week 1

Introduction to poetry; learning poetry styles; learning nature poems

Readings: "nature poems"

Writing activities/assignments: KWL chart, flash cards

Due: k & w portion of KWL chart; study flash cards

Week 2

Continue studying and analyzing poems; students will begin to write their own nature poems

Readings: "nature poems"; peer poetry

Writing activities/ assignments:

Due: nature poems & peer grading rubric

Week 3

Farmers market field trip; market treasure hunt & review; discuss and begin writing farmers market narrative using graphic organizer;

Readings: “how to write narrative essays”

Writing activities/assignments: market treasure hunt; graphic organizer

Due: market treasure hunt; graphic organizer; market narrative essay draft

Week 4

Further explore narrative writing; draft farmers market essay

Readings: free reading; writing narratives tips

Writing activities/assignments: market narrative essay draft

Due: final market narrative essay

Week 5

Watch food security/health video; discuss importance of food studies; begin research on food; discuss research methods—how to research, proper sources; food research graphic organizer

Readings: researching food articles; free reading

Writing activities/assignments: notes on food video; notes on research methods; graphic organizer

Due: notes on food video; notes on research methods; graphic organizer

Due: notes on food video; notes on research methods; food graphic organizer

Week 6

Continue researching methods; finish final food research paper

Readings: research method tips; free reading

Writing activities/assignments: research methods tips; final food paper

Due: final food research paper

Week 7

Introduce transitions & descriptive words

Readings: transition readings and descriptive word readings

Writing activities/assignments: transitions & descriptive words worksheets

Due: worksheets

Week 8

Continue working on transitions and descriptive words and start drafting “favorite place” narrative essay

Readings: free reading

Writing activities/assignments: narrative essay

Due: “favorite place” writing essay

Week 9

Students will learn about claims and supporting arguments with clear reasons and relevant evidence.

Readings: students will read articles that generate ideas for argumentative discussion.

Writing activities/assignments: “finding claims” worksheet, “finding claims and supporting evidence” worksheet, “how to debate” activity, choose topic for an in-class debate on topic of their choosing (from list)

Week 10

Students will continue to learn about claims and supporting arguments in addition to 1) research and gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources 2) draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Readings: read and research articles online to support chosen topic

Writing activities/assignments: “understanding sources” worksheet & activity

Due: graphic organizer w/ 3 supporting arguments and credible sources for claim

Week 11

Students will 1) write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant contents 2) produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience

Readings: 10 min. Of silent reading,

Writing activities/assignments: write paper on debate topic, do peer reviews of paper, teacher feedback and revision of paper

Due: debate paper & presentation

Week 12

Students will write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence. In addition to 1) research and gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources 2) draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research.

Readings: 10 min. Of silent reading (warmups)

Writing activities/assignments: the ‘K & W’ portion of the “KWL” chart on plastic use, watch videos on plastic use and environment, take notes on videos focusing on claims and evidence, play recycle game <https://www3.epa.gov/recyclecity/mainmap.htm> , create graphic organizer with their topic sentence and supporting claims

Due: graphic organizer w/ 3 supporting arguments and credible sources for claim

Week 13 –

Students will 1) produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience 2) write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences 3) students will learn about claims and supporting arguments with clear reasons and relevant evidence .

Readings: 10 min. Of silent reading (warmups), reading letters

Writing activities/assignments: choose public official, create draft letter, peer & teach revision, create final draft letter **Due: letter to public official**

LESSON PLANS & ACTIVITIES

A digital version of the following lessons can be found:

<https://spark.adobe.com/page/uMyawsbVUUGJm/>

In my curriculum I have used several teaching methods and concepts, as explained below:

Alignment— the use of alignment is shown because all the assignments align with course objectives and the GA ELA Middle School Standards. This alignment can be seen in the lesson plan where assignments are listed next to learning objectives.

Sequencing— the assignments are sequenced in a way that generally go from easy to more rigorous, however, I do provide an easier assignment toward the end to avoid having too many difficult assignments back-to-back.

<u>Lesson Plan</u>	<u>Task</u>	<u>Difficulty Level</u>
Nature Poems	Writing nature themed poems Learning poem styles Intro to descriptive words	Easier
From Farm to Paper	Farming treasure hunt Writing narratives Writing research paper	(Narrative) Easier/Moderate (Research Paper) Moderate/Rigorous
Favorite Places	Writing narrative	Moderate
Reducing Everyday Plastic Use	Writing letter to parents Writing letter to public officials	(Letter to Parents) Easier (Letter to Public Officials) Rigorous

Scaffolding— In all the assignments, I use an “I do – We do – You do” concept when I teach. Also, in each lesson I incorporate assignments that lead up to the main assignment. For an example, the “Reducing Everyday Plastic Use” starts by having students write a letter to their parents before a letter to a public official. The “From Farm to Paper” lesson teaches narratives and research to prepare for the following lessons: “Favorite Places” &

“Reducing Everyday Plastic Youth.” In “Nature Poems”, students learn to analyze poems before writing their own.

Lesson 1 Nature Poems

Overview: Upon completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Recognize and distinguish different forms of poetry and literary devices and use it to develop their own poems
2. Examine modern poetry and use them to develop their own personal writing style
3. Analyze and interpret poetry by making personal connections to poems using their own individual perspectives and by listening to the perspectives of their classmates
4. Develop an enhanced perception and appreciation of poetry through class and small-group discussions and exposure to place-based writing in poetry
5. Demonstrate improved writing ability through the collaborative construction of a writing prompt and experimentation with various styles and forms of poetry
6. Demonstrate higher-level thinking through thoughtful, analytical reflection on and experimentation with modern poetry
7. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts (poems) to support analysis, reflection, and research
8. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience
9. Develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach.
10. This will be done by learning about different, popular styles of nature poetry and engaging with nature, so students write their own nature poems.

MONDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVE	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIATION
1. <u>Warm-up</u> (5-10 min): Journaling-Students write one paragraph about what poetry means to them and	ELAGSE6W4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the	What are the different	Ticket out the door-finished acrostic poem	a. Video supports audio/visual learners

<p>they type of poems they like. Complete the “K” section of the KWL chart*</p> <p>2. <u>Teacher Instruction</u> (30 min.) Watch video on poetry introduction; teach different types of poetry and its elements (pick 5 or so)</p> <p>3. <u>Together Instruction</u> (15 min.) show different poems and have students determine which form it is</p> <p>4. <u>Independent Instruction</u> (10-15 min) Students create an acrostic poem using their names</p>	<p>development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</p>	<p>forms of poetry?</p>		<p>b. Students can choose to work in groups or independently</p>
TUESDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVE	ESSENTIAL QUESTION	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIATION
<p>1. <u>Warm-up</u> (10 min.) Based off what students learned on Mon., complete “W” portion of the KWL chart with 3 questions they want to know</p> <p>2. <u>Teacher Instruction</u> (20 min) Teach literary devices in poetry</p> <p>3. <u>Together Instruction</u> (10 min) show different poems and have students point out devices</p> <p>4. <u>Independent Instruction</u> (10-15</p>	<p>ELAGSE6W4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.</p>	<p>What are different types of literary devices used in poetry?</p>	<p>Ticket out the door- flash cards</p>	<p>a. Students can choose to work in groups or independently</p> <p>b. artistic learners use flash cards for creativity</p>

min) Students create flashcards with literary devices & forms of poetry				
WEDNESDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	ESSENTIAL QUESTION	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIATION
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <u>1. Warm- up (5 min)</u> Complete "L" Portion of KWL chart <u>2. Teacher Instruction (15-20 min)</u> Review forms of poetry and literary devices & examples <u>3. Independent Instruction (25 min.)</u> Complete flash cards and have students quiz each other 	ELAGSE6W4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.	What are different forms & types of literary devices used in poetry?	Ticket out the door- flash cards	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Students can choose to work in groups or independently artistic learners use flash cards for creativity
THURSDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	ESSENTIAL QUESTION	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIATION
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <u>1. Warm-up (5 min)</u> Journaling- Students write one paragraph to answer how does nature make you feel? Do you like being outside? Why or why not? <u>2. Teacher Instruction/Together Instruction (30-40 min)</u> Read, recite and analyze nature poems and have students reflect on how poems stimulate senses <u>3. Independent Instruction (15-20 min)</u> Students choose their favorite nature poem and complete reflection page/ "link pg." 	ELAGSE6W4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.	What are ways we analyze poetry?	Ticket out the door- reflection page HW- finish reflection	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> Students can choose to work in groups or independently artistic learners use flash cards for creativity
FRIDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	ESSENTIAL QUESTION	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIATION

1. <u>Warm-up (5 min.)</u> Free write 2. <u>Teacher Instruction (10 min.)</u> review and reflect on nature poems, reflection sheets and place-based writing theories 3. <u>Independent Instruction (30 min)</u> If weather permits, have students go outside and write poem on what inspires them in nature. Encourage them to consider their feelings and their surroundings	ELAGSE6W4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.	What are ways we analyze poetry?	Ticket out the door— Nature poem HW- Finish poem, be prepared to recite	a. Students can choose to work in groups or independently b. artistic learners use construction paper and markers for creativity
<u>MONDAY</u>	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	ESSENTIAL QUESTION	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIATION
1. <u>Warm-up (5min.)</u> Free Write 2. <u>Teacher Instruction (10 min)</u> Instruct students to revise poem and explain how to recite, peer review and grading process 3. <u>Independent Instruction (30 min)</u> students revise poems (10 min) & get in groups to recite and peer review using rubric (20 min)	ELAGSE6W4 Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.	What are ways we analyze poetry?	Finished poems and peer grading	

Assignment 1

Directions: Complete reflection page/ “link page” and use it to construct your own nature poem/s using the following instructions:

- a. The poem must fit one of the forms discussed in class. (1-3 points)

- b. The poem must use at least 2 literary devices discussed in class. (1-3 points)
- c. The poem may either be 1 page long **OR** be a series of 3 shorter poems (1-3 points)
- d. The poem will be graded by yourself, another peer, and your teacher by using the rubric below. Complete the entire rubric (1-3 points)
- e. On a separate sheet of paper, answer the following questions (1-3 points):
 - What form did I use for my poem and why?
 - What two literary devices did I use for my poem?
 - What was my favorite part about writing my nature poem and why?

GRADING SCALE

Use the rubric on the following page to add

SCORE (POINTS)

25-30 Points(A)

20-25 Points (B)

15-20 Points (C)

15 or below Points (F)

*Rubric below comes from:

Susan Ruckdeschel “ Using Classic Poetry to Challenge and Enrich Students' Writing”, Read, Write & Think,
<http://www.readwritethink.org/resources/resource-print.html?id=900>

Name: _____

GREAT POETRY RUBRIC

Directions: Circle the rating for each aspect of the poem. Use blue when evaluating yourself and green when evaluating your partner. The teacher will use purple or red.

	3		2		1	
Extent to which poetry reflects personal voice	Personal voice is clear; poem is understandable and flows, making for enjoyable reading	Self Peer (circle one)	Teacher	Self Peer (circle one)	Teacher	Personal voice is unclear; poem doesn't flow and needs editing
						Self Peer (circle one)
Extent to which poetry reflects individual interpretation	Student's individual interpretation reflects full understanding of the poem	Self Peer (circle one)	Teacher	Self Peer (circle one)	Teacher	Student's individual interpretation reflects no understanding of the poem; the student's poem is unclear and difficult to understand
						Self Peer (circle one)
Extent to which poetry reflects connection to and understanding of class writing prompt or "link"	Student uses class "link" to create a poem	Self Peer (circle one)	Teacher	Self Peer (circle one)	Teacher	Student uses very little of the class "link" to create a poem
						Self Peer (circle one)
Extent to which poetry reflects a unique voice, tone, or style	Poem reflects a tone, voice, and style unique to the writer	Self Peer (circle one)	Teacher	Self Peer (circle one)	Teacher	Poem reflects no voice, style, or tone unique to the writer (may sound too similar to the original poem or another poem)
						Self Peer (circle one)
Extent to which poetry reflects a sense of mood and tone as assigned in the "link"	Poem reflects a full sense of mood and tone as assigned in the "link"	Self Peer (circle one)	Teacher	Self Peer (circle one)	Teacher	Poem reflects no sense of mood and tone as assigned in the "link"
						Self Peer (circle one)

Lesson 2

From Farm to Paper

Overview: Upon completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.
2. Introduce a topic; organize ideas, concepts, and information, using strategies such as definition, classification, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect; include formatting (e.g., headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.
3. Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples.
4. Use appropriate transitions to clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts. Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic.
5. Establish and maintain a formal style.
6. Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the information or explanation presented.
7. Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.
8. Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources.
9. Think more critically about the food they eat and where it comes from.

This will be done by having the class visit a local farmers market + treasure hunt and writing about the experience. Then students will be encouraged to find one food item that interests them, and they want to learn more about. Students will research, write and report on this food to the class. *Students will be required to sign field trip waivers to participate in this assignment. An alternative assignment will be given to students who are unable to attend.

MONDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVE	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIATION
<p>5. <u>Warm-up (5-10 min)</u> Journaling- What is a farmer's market? What do you expect to see there? Draw a picture of what you expect to see.</p> <p>6. <u>Teacher Instruction (10-15 min.)</u> Explain to students the treasure hunt and what to expect on the field trip</p> <p>7. <u>Together Instruction (1/2 school day)</u> FIELD TRIP</p> <p>8. <u>Independent Instruction ½ school day)</u> FIELD TRIP</p>	<p>ELAGSE6W2</p> <p>Develop the topic with relevant facts, definitions, concrete details, quotations, or other information and examples</p>	<p>How can we use facts, details and quotations to discuss the farmers market?</p>	<p>Students complete treasure hunt</p>	<p>1.Students may choose to work in groups or independently 2. Students who do not attend the trip may visit virtual farmers market</p>
TUESDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVE	ESSENTIAL QUESTION	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIATION
<p>5. <u>Warm-up (5-10 min.)</u> Journaling- What 3 things did you learn from the farmers market? What were your 3 favorite food items?</p> <p>6. <u>Teacher Instruction (20 min.)</u> Review key points from market visit and discuss the paper students will write essay about the experience</p> <p>7. <u>Together Instruction</u> Review market visit</p>	<p>ELAGSE6W3</p> <p>Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well- structured event sequences.</p>	<p>How do you write a narrative essay?</p>	<p>Completed graphic organizer</p>	<p>Students may work in groups or independently</p>

8. <u>Independent Instruction (20 min.)</u> Use graphic organizer to plan essay				
WEDNESDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	ESSENTIAL QUESTION	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIATION
4. <u>Warm-up (10 min.)</u> What kind of hook-sentence would you use in your narrative essay that will grab reader's attention? 5. <u>Teacher Instruction (20 min.)</u> Discuss parts of a narrative essay 6. <u>Independent Instruction (15-20 min)</u> Begin drafting essay	ELAGSE6W3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.	What are parts of a narrative essay?	Working-essay draft	Students may work independently or in groups.
THURSDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	ESSENTIAL QUESTION	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIATION
4. <u>Warm-up (5 min.)</u> Free writing 5. <u>Teacher Instruction/Together Instruction (10 min.)</u> Review parts of a narrative essay 6. <u>Independent Instruction (30 min.)</u> Continue working on draft essay	ELAGSE6W3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.	What are parts of a narrative essay?	Essay draft	Students may work independently or in groups. Some students may write in the hallways
FRIDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	ESSENTIAL QUESTION	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIATION
4. <u>Warm-up (10 min.)</u> Remember your 3 favorite foods from the farmers market? Pick 1	ELAGSE6W3 Write narratives to develop real or imagined	What are parts of a narrative essay?	Finished essay for summative grade	Students may work independently or in groups. Some

<p>out of those and discuss why you like it the most?</p> <p>5. <u>Teacher Instruction</u> (10 min.) Review parts of a narrative essay</p> <p>6. <u>Independent Instruction</u> Finish farmers market narrative essay</p>	<p>experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.</p>			<p>students may write in the hallways</p>
<u>MONDAY</u>	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	ESSENTIAL QUESTION	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIATION
<p>4. <u>Warm-up</u> (5 min.) You choose 1 food that you liked from the market. What are some things you would like to learn about it?</p> <p>5. <u>Teacher Instruction</u> (30 min.) Discuss with students their favorite foods and watch a video on food security and/or health. Gear students up to begin writing food research paper</p> <p>6. <u>Independent Instruction</u> Students take notes on the facts from the video</p>	<p>ELAGSE6W8 Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources</p> <p>ELAGSE6W7 Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.</p>	<p>How do we begin to collect data for research?</p>	<p>Video notes</p>	

ASSIGNMENT 2

Directions: Write a 2-3 pg. double-spaced paper on the food you choose to research. This paper must include:

1. A minimum of 3 different properly cited & credible sources (note, you must include sources for questions c, e, f, g & h, but 3 of them must be from different sources. This means at least 2 sources can be used multiple times.)
2. A graphic of the food

3. A recipe you can make with the food

The paper must include the answers to the following questions:

- a. Why did you choose this food it?
- b. Have you had this food before? If so, what does it taste like? If not, what do you think it may taste like?
- c. What is the origin of this food? (include source)
- d. What ingredients are in this food? (if it applies)
- e. What is the nutritional value of this food? (include source)
- f. Is this food healthy for you or not? How come? (include source)
- g. How is this food item grown and/or produced? (include source)
- h. What are 2 interesting facts about this food? (include source)

GRADING SCALE

SCORE	CRITERIA
90—100 (A)	Your paper meets the minimum page numbers & includes graphic + recipe. It answers all the questions, uses 3 different sources and sites sources properly, flows well through great use of transitions, little to no grammar errors
80—89 (B)	Your story almost meets minimum page numbers, includes graphic + recipe, it answers 6 out of the 8 questions and sites at least 2 sources, good use of transitions, moderate grammar errors
70—79 (C)	Your story does not almost minimum page numbers (half or less), may not include graphic + recipe, it answers 4 out of the 8 questions and sites at least 1 source, decent use of transitions, clear grammar errors

69 or below (F)	Your story does not meet any of the minimum requirements listed above.
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Lesson 3 Favorite Places

Overview: Upon completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Write narratives to develop real or imagined experiences or events using effective technique, relevant descriptive details, and well-structured event sequences.
2. Engage and orient the reader by establishing a context and introducing a narrator and/or characters; organize an event sequence that unfolds naturally and logically.
3. Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters.
4. Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts from one-time frame or setting to another.
5. Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events

This will be done by using place-based writing strategies where students can examine and think more critically about their environment and surroundings by writing a story about their favorite place, but without the use of human characters.

MONDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVE	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIATION
9. <u>Warm-up</u> (5 min): Journaling- Students write paragraph describing where they are from. 10. <u>Teacher Instruction</u> (25 min.) Give lesson on descriptive writing	ELAGSE6W3 Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences,	What are qualities of descriptive writing?	Students in-class writing descriptive writing	Students may work while talking quietly; some may work in the hallway

<p>11. <u>Independent Instruction (15 min)</u> Students write, describing where they are from using the 5 senses. Ex- Where I am from smells like ____.</p> <p>Encourage students to use descriptive and sensory language and write 2-3 sentences for each of the 5 senses.</p>	<p>events, and/or characters. c. Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts from one-time frame or setting to another. d. Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.</p>			
<p>TUESDAY</p>	<p>LEARNING OBJECTIVE</p>	<p>ESSENTIAL QUESTION</p>	<p>EVALUATION</p>	<p>DIFFERENTIATION</p>
<p>9. <u>Warm-up (5 min.)</u> Journaling- students describe what is their morning routine</p> <p>10. <u>Teacher Instruction (20 min)</u> Give lesson on transitions</p> <p>11. <u>Independent Instruction (25 min)</u> Give an assignment on transitions</p>	<p>ELAGSE6W3</p> <p>Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters. c. Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and</p>	<p>What are examples of transitions and why are they important?</p>	<p>Completed transitions assignment</p>	<p>Some students may work in groups or independently</p>

	signal shifts from one-time frame or setting to another. d. Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.			
WEDNESDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	ESSENTIAL QUESTION	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIATION
<u>7. Warm- up (5 min) Free Write</u> <u>8. Teacher Instruction (15 min) Review descriptive words and transitions</u> <u>9. Independent Instruction (30 min.) Complete review activity</u>	<p>ELAGSE6W3</p> <p>Use narrative techniques, such as dialogue, pacing, and description, to develop experiences, events, and/or characters. c. Use a variety of transition words, phrases, and clauses to convey sequence and signal shifts from one-time frame or setting to another. d. Use precise words and phrases, relevant descriptive</p>	<p>What would happen if we did not use transitional words?</p>	<p>Students turn in review</p>	<p>Some students may receive closed notes on the review</p>

	details, and sensory language to convey experiences and events.			
THURSDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	ESSENTIAL QUESTION	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIATION
1. <u>Warm- up (5 min.)</u> 2. <u>Teacher Instruction (15 min)</u> Instruct students to write a 4-pg. narrative about their favorite place. They need to use descriptive words/phrases as well as proper use of transitions. ** 3. <u>Independent Instruction (30 min.)</u>	** students may need additional instruction on narrative writing	What is a narrative story?	Summative grading of narrative story	Students can write their story or produce audio version
FRIDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	ESSENTIAL QUESTION	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIATION
1. Warm up (5 min.) 2. <u>Teacher Instruction (15 min.)</u> Narrative writing advanced 3. <u>Independent Instruction (30 min)</u> Write narrative		What is a narrative story?	Summative grading of narrative story	Students can write their story or produce audio version

ASSIGNMENT 3

Directions: Write a two-page short story narrative where the setting is your favorite place and include a graphic of this place (this could be a drawing or an actual photograph). You must incorporate descriptive language, proper use of transitions, and dialogue in your story. There must be no human characters in your story, so the dialogue must be between objects and other things in your surroundings. Be creative.

GRADING SCALE

SCORE	CRITERIA
90—100 (A)	Your story meets the 2-pg. minimum and includes graphic. It is creative and uses great descriptive language, flows well through use of transitions, invokes feeling and a real sense of place, great use of personification and other literary devices, little to no grammar errors.
80—89 (B)	Your story is 1.5 pages and includes graphic, it is creative and uses good amount of descriptive language, good use of transitions, may slightly lack sense of place and literary devices, moderate grammar errors.
70—79 (C)	Your story is 1 page and may or may not include the graphic, lacks creativity and uses minimal descriptive language, transitions are minimally used or not at all.
69 or below (F)	Your story does not meet minimum requirements listed above.

Lesson 4

Reducing Everyday Plastic Use

Overview: Upon completion of this lesson, students will be able to:

1. Write arguments to support claims with clear reasons and relevant evidence
2. Write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection of organization, and analysis of relevant content
3. Draw evidence from literary or informational texts to support analysis, reflection, and research
4. Produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience.
5. Use technology, including the Internet, to produce and publish writing as well as to interact and collaborate with others.

This will be done by examining their own use and feelings toward plastic material, learning about the effects of plastic on the environment, and constructing a letter to a public official about their concerns on the effects of plastic in the environment.

MONDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVE	ESSENTIAL QUESTIONS	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIAL
<p><u>Warm-up</u> (10 min): Think about the many ways in which you use plastic in your daily life (bottles, bags, food packages, etc.). Complete the “K” section of the KWL chart*</p> <p><u>Teacher Instruction</u> (30 min.) Watch Videos http://storyofstuff.org/movies/story-of-bottled-water/</p> <p>https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6HBtl4sHTqU</p> <p>After videos, discuss aloud what students learned and students take notes and prepare for organizing. *</p> <p><u>Independent Instruction</u> (15 min) Students complete graphic organizer on a claim*</p>	<p>ELAGSE6W1</p> <p>Introduce claim(s) and organize the reasons and evidence clearly</p> <p>Support claim(s) with clear reasons and relevant evidence, using credible sources and demonstrating an understanding of the topic or text.</p>	<p>What claim can you make about plastic & environment?</p> <p>What are your reasons to support the claim?</p>	<p>Ticket out the Door-graphic organizer & Essential Question</p>	<p>1. Students have the option to choose their own topic sentence as it relates to plastic and the environment.</p> <p>2. Students may work independently or in groups for the graphic organizer</p>

TUESDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVE	ESSENTIAL QUESTION	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIAL-TION
<p><u>Warm-up (10 min.)</u> Based off what students learned on Mon., complete “W” portion of the KWL chart with 3 questions they want to know</p> <p><u>Teacher Instruction (15 min)</u> Discuss with students their warm-up, and the research they will complete, how to cite sources</p> <p><u>Independent Instruction (30 min)</u> Allow students to research on computers to answer their own questions from warm up and cite sources</p>	<p>ELAGSE6W7: Conduct short research projects to answer a question, drawing on several sources and refocusing the inquiry when appropriate.</p> <p>ELAGSE6W8: Gather relevant information from multiple print and digital sources; assess the credibility of each source; and quote or paraphrase the data and conclusions of others while avoiding plagiarism and providing basic bibliographic information for sources</p>	How did you research the questions you had about plastic and the environment?	Ticket out the door-answer 3 questions from KWL chart from research	1. Some students may work in groups; some students may need to be given sources
WEDNESDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	ESSENTIAL QUESTION	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIAL-TION
<p><u>Warm-up (10 min)</u> Complete “L” Portion of KWL chart</p> <p><u>Teacher Instruction (20 min)</u> Explain to students based off what they</p>	<p>ELAGSE6W2 Introduce a topic; organize ideas, concepts, and information, using strategies such as definition, classification, comparison/contrast, and cause/effect; include formatting (e.g.,</p>	1. What are the basics of letter writing?	Graphic organize	1. Students may work in groups or independently to complete graphic organizer

learned; they will write a letter to a public official addressing their concern. Show examples of letter writing <u>Independent Instruction (30 min.)</u> Complete graphic organizer #2 to draft letter*	headings), graphics (e.g., charts, tables), and multimedia when useful to aiding comprehension.			
THURSDAY	LEARNING OBJECTIVES	ESSENTIAL QUESTION	EVALUATION	DIFFERENTIAL-TION
<u>Warm-up (10 min)</u> Journaling- Give three reasons why writing this letter is important. <u>Teacher Instruction (20 min)</u> Talk about public officials, their roles and choosing which person to send the letter to <u>Independent Instruction (25 min.)</u> Start drafting letter	ELAGSE6W2 Use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic; establish and maintain a formal style; Provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the information or explanation presented	What is the purpose of letter writing?	A drafted letter	1.Students will either draft a handwritten letter or an email 2. Some students may write letter in group with distinct parts

ASSIGNMENT 4

Directions: We have spent this unit working on how to research, write a claim and defend an environmental issue. Now it is time to put into real practice what you have learned. Write a 1-2-page letter to a public official addressing the concern of how plastic effects our environment. This letter will be sent to the public official, so it is important to be professional. Your letter must include the following points:

1. The name and address of the public official in proper letter format

2. A brief introduction of yourself (name, grade, school)
3. Why you are writing this letter
4. 3 claims and supporting evidence why plastic is harmful to the environment
5. 1 solution you want to offer
6. 1 question you want to ask the official

GRADING SCALE

SCORE	CRITERIA
90 – 100 (A)	Your letter includes all 6 points with little to no spelling or grammatical errors. Your letter is professional, engaging and demonstrates excellent knowledge of research, writing supporting claims and letter formatting.
80-89 (B)	Your letter only includes 4-5 points and have some spelling and grammatical errors. Your letter is professional and engaging and demonstrates satisfactory knowledge of research, writing supporting claims and letter formatting.
70 –79 (C)	Your letter only includes 3 points and has considerable spelling and grammatical errors. Your letter is not professional and engaging and demonstrates less than satisfactory knowledge of research, writing supporting claims and letter formatting.
69 or below (F)	Your letter only includes 2 points or fewer and has considerable spelling and grammatical errors. Your letter is not professional and engaging and demonstrates incomplete knowledge of research, writing supporting claims and letter formatting.

INTER-CHAPTER

“Inclusion Classrooms”

Until this point, I have provided information on why and how I, and other interested ELA teachers, can teach nature writing in middle school. The remaining portion of my portfolio focuses on teaching nature writing to middle school students with disabilities (SWD). This is an

important focus in my portfolio because it is common for ELA teachers to teach inclusion classrooms, classes that are a mixture of general education and special education students. In the following sections of my portfolio, I have included three documents: an essay on Differentiated Instruction (created in Teaching Writing in High School and College PRWR 6500), a proposal to create a school garden for SWD, and activities ELA students can do with the garden (both created in Issues and Research in Professional Writing PRWR 6000).

1. “What is Differentiated Instruction and Why Is it Important?” – This essay explains why teachers need to implement a variety of teaching styles to match different learning needs and abilities. Though this essay does not directly mention nature writing, it gives background on the types of classes I will teach when incorporating nature writing. This essay indicates that I would consider all students in my class, even those with learning disabilities.
2. School Garden Proposal – This proposal is a document that discusses the benefits of school gardens for SWD and is addressed to the Cobb County School District to invest in a garden for one of their schools. The school garden would allow students to become involved in activities in nature and writing about it, which incorporates ecoliteracy, as described in the first essay.
3. School Garden Activities— Many schools have adopted a school garden. The activities I created in this document are meant to engage students in ELA instruction through gardening activities. These activities are listed and described in steps that cater to inclusion classrooms.

RESEARCH ESSAY

“What is Differentiated Instruction and why is it Important?”

“Just as everyone has a unique fingerprint, every student has an individual learning style”⁴³, and differentiated instruction is tailoring lessons to meet the individual learning needs of students. The history of differentiated instruction stems from a time, especially in rural settings from U.S. colonization up until the 1970s, when students of all grade levels would be taught by one teacher in a schoolhouse. Teachers would have to differentiate the lessons due to the students different ages, but in 1971 when students were grouped into grade levels, teachers learned that age alone was not the only difference in a child’s learning ability⁴⁴.

In schools today, more general education classrooms also include students with disabilities. In fact, 58 percent of middle and high school students with disabilities will spend 80 percent of their school day within the general education class⁴⁵. Over the last 25 years, there has been an increase in the inclusion of students with disabilities (SWD) into general education classrooms due to the belief general education classes offer a “less restrictive and socially just” environment, and this trend does not seem to be ending soon⁴⁶. This means grade school teachers not only have to be prepared to accommodate the many needs of students in a general education class, but also students who would otherwise be in special education classrooms. The issue comes into play when teachers are not prepared to integrate differentiated instruction for their general education students, let alone SWD, and according to a 2018 study on 16 middle school ELA classrooms, most language arts teachers are not⁴⁷.

⁴³ Cathy Weselby, “What is Differentiated Instruction? Examples of How to Differentiate Instruction in the Classroom”, C Room 24/ Concordia University Portland, Oct. 1, 2014, <https://education.cu-portland.edu/blog/classroom-resources/examples-of-differentiated-instruction/>

⁴⁴ Cathy Weselby, “What is Differentiated Instruction”

⁴⁵ Jade Wexler et.al, “Reading Comprehension and Co-Teaching Practices in Middle School English Language Arts Classrooms,” *Exceptional Children* 84, no. 4 (July 2018): 384-402

⁴⁶ Jade Wexler, “Reading Comprehension”, 384-402

⁴⁷ Jade Wexler, “Reading Comprehension”, 384-402

The research study mentioned above, led by Jade Wexler, a Professor of Special Education and Literacy Studies at the University of Maryland, indicated that ELA middle school teachers are not following the proper, evidence-based protocol when differentiating lessons for SWD. The language arts teachers who participated in the study failed to demonstrate a) high-leverage learning strategies, which includes checking for reading comprehension. Teachers would often teach, for example, vocabulary but not necessarily how to use the vocabulary within their student's writing and reading⁴⁸. Another study, "Literacy and Text Reading in Middle and High School Social Studies and English Language Arts Classrooms" studied 137 language arts and social studies class rooms and reported an insufficient amount of instruction on comprehension instruction as well ⁴⁹ as limited opportunities to respond to students which includes frequent interaction and quicker feedback, practices that tend to accommodate SWD more. Some solutions to these problems will be discussed in the "Best Practices: An Action Plan for Differentiated Instruction" section of this paper, but first, criticisms of differentiated instruction will be addressed.

Criticism of Differentiated Instruction

When it comes down to it, grade schoolteachers are faced with a tremendous amount of pressure and a seemingly never-ending list of added responsibilities. Critics of differentiated instruction argue that there is simply not enough time for teachers to create several different individualized lesson plans for the 100-150 students they teach every day and still have time to give any proper instruction at all, let alone grade, attend meetings, address parents, report data, create proper lesson plans, maintain effective classroom management, and the many other things

⁴⁸ Jade Wexler, "Reading Comprehension", 384-402

⁴⁹ Elizabeth Swanson et. al, "Literacy and text reading in middle and high school social studies and English language arts classrooms." *Reading & Writing Quarterly*, (2015): 32, 199-222

teachers have to handle on a daily basis⁵⁰. Also, just like students have different styles of learning that come natural to them, teachers have different styles of teaching that come natural to them as well. Therefore, this idea of differentiated instruction is unrealistic and is not supported by some. Furthermore, some argue that differentiated instruction is an issue that administration and policy makers need to address because often times, even though some teachers may want to utilize differentiated instruction practices, they are not supported by administration who prefer teachers to adhere to such strict teaching guidelines that don't offer much room for the kind of adjustments differentiation requires.⁵¹

Although there are many hindrances to differentiation that do require attention at the policy-making level of education, in the next section, best practices for ways teachers can gradually and subtly differentiate instruction are highlighted.

Best Practices: An Action Plan for Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction does not necessarily mean making the lesson easier for general students or SWD, in fact, it could be quite the opposite. It has been stated one of the best practices to teaching basic writing, or what would be consider remedial writing courses, is to “assume students can learn and deserve to be engaged in serious intellectual activities and curricula, not skill-and-drill-based “remediation”⁵². It is about meeting the student where they currently are, allowing them to acknowledge what they already know in order to encourage them to transition to what they *need* to know⁵³. Teachers need to create a learning environment so that this can take place in the most effective form. The most effective and affordable ways to

⁵⁰ Jaweria Aftab, “Teachers’ Beliefs about Differentiated Instructions in Mixed Ability Classrooms: A Case of Time Limitation,” *Journal of Education and Educational Development* 2 no. 2 (Dec. 2015): 94–114.

⁵¹ Aftab, Jaweria. “Teachers’ Beliefs about Differentiated Instructions in Mixed Ability Classrooms”, 94–114

⁵² Deborah Mutnick, “Basic Writing Pedagogy”, *A Guide to Composition Pedagogies*, Edited by Gary Tate, Amy Taggart, Kurt Schick, and H. Brooke Hessler (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014), 20

⁵³ Mutnick, “Basic Writing Pedagogy”, 20

implement differentiated instruction involve four areas: content, process, product, and environment. The following best practices are excerpted from Carl Tomlinson's "Differentiation of Instruction in the Elementary Grades."

<p>CONTENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Using reading materials at varying readability levels; -Putting text materials on tape; -Using spelling or vocabulary lists at readiness levels of students; -Presenting ideas through both auditory and visual means; -Using reading buddies; and -Meeting with small groups to re-teach an idea or skill for struggling learners, or to extend the thinking or skills of advanced learners. 	<p>PROCESS</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Using tiered activities through which all learners work with the same important understandings and skills, but proceed with different levels of support, challenge, or complexity; -Providing interest centers that encourage students to explore subsets of the class topic of particular interest to them; -Developing personal agendas (task lists written by the teacher and containing both in-common work for the whole class and work that addresses individual needs of learners) to be completed either during specified agenda time or as students complete other work early; -Offering manipulatives or other hands-on supports for students who need them; and -Varying the length of time a student may take to complete a task in order to provide additional support for a struggling learner or to encourage an advanced learner to pursue a topic in greater depth.
<p>PRODUCT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Giving students options of how to express required learning (e.g., create a puppet show, write a letter, or develop a mural with labels); -Using rubrics that match and extend students' varied skills levels; -Allowing students to work alone or in small groups on their products; and -Encouraging students to create their own product assignments as long as the assignments contain required elements. 	<p>ENVIRONMENT</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Making sure there are places in the room to work quietly and without distraction, as well as places that invite student collaboration; -Providing materials that reflect a variety of cultures and home settings; -Setting out clear guidelines for independent work that matches individual needs; -Developing routines that allow students to get help when teachers are busy with other students and cannot help them immediately

Though this content was initially geared toward elementary grades, it has been noted useful in middle grades language arts classrooms as well⁵⁴. Carol Ann Tomlinson is one of the leading scholars of differentiated instruction and has a background in English and youth education. It is important to note she advocates for teachers to understand their student's learning styles prior to making the lesson plan so that it is factored into the instruction versus attempting to alter a ready-made lesson plan⁵⁵. With this recommendation, it would be beneficial to also implement an assessment of some sort at the beginning of the school year to better understand the needs and learning abilities of students. An example of an assessment would be to have students take a quiz to determine their dominant type of intelligence— musical, existential, logical-mathematical, intrapersonal, bodily-kinesthetic, linguistic, interpersonal, spatial and naturalist⁵⁶. Another assessment idea would be to give students a questionnaire to learn more about their learning style and interests. Directly asking students, *which ways do you learn best*, can provide insight on how to create lessons for that particular class.

Lastly, due to the inclusion of SWD in general education classrooms, more general education or content teachers are assigned co-teachers in the class to assist with the SWD. However, more times than not, the co-teacher ends up playing the role of a teacher's assistant or helper, running errands and doing miscellaneous tasks, versus actually working together, side-by-side to offer differentiated instruction⁵⁷. Content teachers working with the co-teacher to devise a curriculum that can be adapted to meet the needs of all students in the classroom would alleviate some of the pressure on the content teacher. This way, students who need extra support,

⁵⁴ Carol Tomlinson, Carol "What is Differentiated Instruction" *Reading Rockets*, 2000
<http://www.readingrockets.org/article/what-differentiated-instruction>

⁵⁵ Weselby, "What is Differentiated Instruction? Examples of How to Differentiate Instruction in the Classroom"

⁵⁶ Howard Gardner, *Frames of mind: The theory of multiple intelligences*, (New York: Basic Books, 1983)

⁵⁷ Wexler, et.al, "Reading Comprehension and Co-Teaching Practices"

attention or more individualized learning can receive the help they need from the co-teacher while maintaining the rigor and inclusion found in general education classrooms.



SCHOOL GARDEN PROPOSAL

COBB COUNTY SCHOOL DISTRICT

**AN EXAMPLE GRANT PROPOSAL TO INCLUDE SCHOOL
GARDENS IN COBB COUNTY K-12 SCHOOLS**

CONTENTS

1. Letter to the Cobb County School District President
2. Benefits of a School Garden for Student Inclusion
3. Needs Assessment: Why Cobb County Schools?
4. The Plan
5. Goals & Objectives
6. The Budget
7. Community & Funding Resources



Stormy Kage
Lovejoy Middle School
555 Scholarship Rd.
Austell, Ga. 30106

December 9, 2019

Dr. Betty Theresa
514 Glover St.
Marietta, Ga. 30060

Dear Dr. Theresa:

On behalf of the Special Education Department at Lovejoy Middle School, it gives me great pleasure to introduce "Gardening for School Inclusion: A Proposal to Introduce School Gardening to the Cobb County School District." The Special Education Department (SPEDD) has been through its trials and tribulations from short staffing to layoffs and student overpopulation in some of the Title 1 schools. Despite that, within the last few years, the SPEDD has overcome many of these pitfalls and has been recognized as one of the leading counties in Georgia known for progressive K-12 education in STEAM and special education.

This proposal encourages the Cobb County School District (CCSD) to maintain its reputation by offering a plan to incorporate county-wide, on-campus school gardening for special education departments and students in Title 1 schools. In doing so, Cobb County will be the first county to implement such an initiative, yet again, setting the bar high.

Due to recent movements in education around school gardening, healthy eating and innovative curriculum, this proposal hopes to identify the reasons why having a school garden is not only about being part of the movement, but being able to offer our students the best education they can possibly have.

Sincerely,

Stormy Kage
7th Grade Inclusion Teacher
Lovejoy Middle School

Benefits of a School Garden

Overview

It was Michelle Obama who largely made school gardening popular in again 2009 when she launched her White House Kitchen Garden and allowed school children across the country to take part in preparing, maintaining, and harvesting the first vegetable garden the White House has had since World War II. Wide-eyed Americans watched as Mrs. Obama encouraged schools across the nation to get fit and eat healthy, fresh, locally grown foods with their own gardens.

Research that supports the benefits of school gardening is much more common in areas such as student's increased knowledge in agriculture and food sustainability, access to fresh fruits and vegetables for students and their families, and an overall aesthetically pleasing school ground. However, this proposal focuses on a less known, yet increasingly popular, advantage by highlighting the benefits of school gardening in Title 1 schools for special education and inclusion classrooms using horticulture therapy.

Special Education & Inclusion Classrooms

Special education (SPED) creates a learning environment for students with certain learning, intellectual, social, emotional, and/or behavioral exceptionalities that require individual consideration, care, and curriculum. Many public-school special education classes separate students by holding class in different rooms from their general education peers. The special education classes are considerably smaller in classroom size, with student count between 2 and 11 and are often located in an excluded section of the school. However, it has become more common to integrate classes, typically with SPED students joining general education students in

their classrooms— known as inclusion classrooms. In fact, in 2018, 58 percent of SPED students reported having spent 80 percent of their school days in general education classrooms.⁵⁸

This proposal is directed toward all SPED students, regardless of the type of classrooms they are part of, to offer ideas to support inclusion by using horticulture therapeutic methods in a school garden setting.

What is Horticultural Therapy?

Horticultural therapy has emerged over the last 5–10 years as an effective way to help treat, heal and provide therapeutic relief for those who need social, mental, emotional and spiritual aid. The American Horticultural Therapy Association (AHTA) defines horticultural therapy as “the engagement of a person in gardening and plant-based activities, facilitated by a trained therapist, to achieve specific therapeutic treatment goals”. There are several ways a horticultural therapist would conduct treatment, but activities must incorporate cultivating live plants to be considered an authentic horticulture therapy practice. There are three key considerations to any effective horticulture practice:

- Activities should be small and simple, and not too overbearing or difficult, therefore rewarding to most who participate in the therapy
- The therapeutic feature of the activity is delivered through the process of the activity, not the finished product
- Psychological and physiological benefits can occur even from those who are passively participating by watching. Students can watch until they choose to participate.

⁵⁸ Wexler, Jade et.al, “Reading Comprehension and Co-Teaching Practices in Middle School English Language Arts Classrooms,” *Exceptional Children* 84, no. 4 (July 2018): 384–02

Examples of horticultural therapy activities include pulling weeds, growing greenhouse crops, harvesting flowers, making bonsai trees, making crafts from dried flowers, etc.

Horticultural therapy will work to help students learn new skills or regain skills that have been forgotten. This type of therapy improves cognitive ability, memory, language and social skills, helps with balance, coordination and endurance, and teaches problem solving and following instructions— all skills that special education children could especially benefit from.

Just like its counterparts in art therapy, music therapy and recreational therapy, horticultural therapy requires specific education, training and credentials to properly perform such rehabilitation. It is most common to find horticultural therapists working in psychiatric wards, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, educational centers for disabled persons, and prisons. This proposal aims to introduce the emergence of this therapy in the public-school special education system in Cobb County.

Horticultural Therapy— A Public School Case Study

A 2008 article published in the *International Journal of Inclusive Education* titled “‘Our Garden is Color Blind, Inclusive and Warm’ Reflections on Green School Grounds and Social Inclusion” published a study on 451 elementary and middle schools and 102 high schools on the effects of school gardening. Overall, there was a 52 percent increase of feelings of inclusion for students with special needs where school gardens were present. The teachers and administrators of these schools reported significant improvements in their student’s behavior, academics, social interactions and classroom management. In particular, this report documented benefits of children who live in lower income or urban areas as well as special education students.

Because Title 1 schools largely consist of students who live in lower income or urban areas, the benefits for these students are important to consider. Most urban areas are

industrialized and surrounded by construction, machinery, factories and other business elements. Children growing up in these environments are used to the hustle and bustle of city-living which can cause stress on some, especially if the child does require special needs. Allowing these children to have greater access to nature and experience planting can create much needed therapeutic effects on the child's mental, emotional, and social development.

Within the special education student population, mainly those with intellectual and physical disabilities, the students in the study felt they had a "safe space" away from loud noises, too much commotion, and other incidents that would trigger unwanted symptoms in their disabilities. Many of the autistic children gravitated toward the garden due to the sensory satisfaction from being able to touch and hold onto trees and look at the differing colors of the plants. The garden helped the children feel secure and not have to worry about being bullied or picked on by other students.

Potential Threats

Though there are many positive benefits to school gardening, there are some weaknesses or potential threats to a successful gardening operation. S. Dilip addressed in the study, "Constraints Perceived by Students in School Vegetable Gardening," that if not done properly, school gardens can fail due to lack of teacher and student participation, funding, and resources to maintain the garden during the summer months when school is out. Part 4 of this proposal will address these potential threats and offer solutions that will support a successful gardening experience for students with disabilities.

Potential Benefits

The following chart was adopted from Wilsonville High School in Wilsonville, Oregon and lists the many benefits of horticultural therapy:

Interaction	Known Health Benefit
Viewing Nature	Improves concentration, remedies mental fatigue, improves psychological health (particularly emotional and cognitive aspects)
	Reduces stress and tension and improves self-reports of wellbeing (positively influencing the immune system by reducing stress hormones such as cortisol and corticosterone)
	When exposed to scenes of natural environments subjects recover faster and are more resistant to subsequent stress, which also is likely to boost immunity
	Recovery from a stressful event is faster and more complete when subjects are exposed to natural rather than urban scenes, and heart rate and muscle tension decreases (yet it increases when viewing urban scenes)
	Viewing nature improves performance in attention demanding tasks
	Viewing nature aids recovery from mental fatigue (attention restoration) and encourages reflections by requiring involuntary attention
	Views of flowers and trees in the workplace reduce perceived of job stress, improve job satisfaction, and reduce the incidence of reported illness and headaches of office workers
	Trees nearby: decrease levels of fear, incivilities, and violence amongst residence; decrease crime rates in public housing; and improve life satisfaction of residence
Being in Nature	Natural play settings reduce the severity of symptoms of children diagnosed with Attention Deficit Disorder (ADD) and improve concentration
	Viewing nature enhances residents' satisfaction and makes higher density living more acceptable
	Natural surroundings assist cognitive functions in children
	Wilderness areas provide spiritual inspiration, enable people to gain a fresh perspective on life, and provide an opportunity to 'get away'
	Therapy in a wilderness setting heals emotional and psychological conditions and can aid those recovering from substance abuse and violence
	Outward Bound and similar programs use wilderness challenges to boost self-confidence and self-esteem
Observing Plants and Gardens, or Gardening	Community gardens increase community cohesion, reduce graffiti and violence and enhance self-image of residence
	Gardening and gardens help people feel tranquil and at peace
	In habitat restoration people see a metaphor for their own personal transformation and growth, enhancing psychological wellbeing
	Gardens improve psychological wellbeing, provide environmental stimulation, a means of self-expression, physical exercise, and social interaction for residents of retirement communities
	Residents who have nature nearby or regularly pursue nature-related activities (e.g. gardening, bird watching) have greater neighborhood satisfaction, overall health and life satisfaction than residence who do not
Observing/Encountering Animals (Pets and Wildlife)	Pets provide companionship, and an opportunity to nurture and express intimacy, as well as facilitating social networks
	The site of, or touching a pet can reduce stress, decrease blood pressure and heart rate
	Pet owners report fewer minor health problems and have better mental health than non-owners (regardless of overall health, socio-economic status and physical exercise)
	Owning a pet can reduce the risk factors for cardiovascular disease (systolic blood pressure, plasma cholesterol, plasma triglycerides) independent of lifestyle and other health factors
	Observing native animals, having them nearby, or interacting with them improves quality of life

Needs Assessment

Why Cobb County Schools?

Cobb County has the second largest school district in Georgia and the 23rd largest in the entire country—needless to say, Cobb is on the radar and many school districts look toward CCSD when it comes to decision making. CCSD employs 1,344 special education teachers, one of the largest in the state, and is home to H.A.V.E.N at Sky View, a special education school for students with severe emotional behavioral disorder and autism— making Cobb an ideal district to implement school gardening for student inclusion as a county practice.

For Cobb, the idea of school gardening should not be too far-fetched. In 2018, Cobb won the Golden Radish Awards for its outstanding work in bringing agriculture, local foods, and gardening to schools in the district. Cobb County especially was acknowledged for the following achievements:

- Consistently serving over 1,000,000 pounds of locally grown produce per year
- Cobb County Farm Bureau collaborates with educators to lead farm to school activities in the district. Last year, beekeepers from Hometown Honey visited King Springs Elementary to teach students about honey.
- Students used school garden grown produce for hands-on cooking activities, including making pepper jelly, herbed biscuits, school garden pizzas, and preparing meals for STEM night.

Though each of these accomplishments are outstanding, most of the schools who continue to benefit from these endeavors were not Title 1 schools. However, in 2017, Green Acres Elementary principal, Ashley Mize, took the initiative to apply for a private grant that offered the school \$75,000 to start a school garden. Green Acres, a Title 1 school with over 90

percent of its students receiving free and reduced lunch, serves as a catalyst for “Gardening for Student Inclusion” and a model that other Title 1 schools can follow.

Notice the unnecessary extra spaces.

The Plan

The Personnel

Each school should have identified committed and reliable teachers, administration, staff, students, parents, and volunteers who want to be part of the school’s gardening team. There may be a horticultural therapist within the school or the community who could be of benefit to the inclusion students, but if not, certain special education teachers can choose to take horticulture therapy courses and training. It is crucial to include students in the entire planning process, from designing the layout of the garden to what plants are grown to harvesting them for the season. Students who are actively involved in the process tend to reap the benefits of gardening and horticultural therapy. When choosing gardening team personnel, consider:

- **Teachers-** Science teachers, lead teachers who have organizational skills, special education teachers
- **Maintenance Staff-** Custodians often know the best places for storage, so that gardening tools can be stowed, and know where there is water supply for feeding the plants.

Because the maintenance staff usually works year-round, it is likely that when school is closed during the summer months they can keep parts of the garden maintained and well groomed.
- **Food Service Staff-** Those who work in or with the cafeteria may be able to offer assistance with activities that may involve food preparation with the vegetables and fruits

from the garden. Also, they could save many of the leftover foods that could serve as compost for the garden soil.

- **Students-** This is a great opportunity for students to not only learn agricultural skills, but teamwork, leadership and responsibility. Have students create their own ideas for the garden and help them bring it to fruition. This will foster great student-teacher and peer relationships amongst the children.
- **Parents-** Find parents involved in PTA; some parents may find this involvement a great bonding opportunity for them and their children and may also have experience with gardening or horticultural therapy; parents are also great to help encourage their children stick with their gardening responsibilities
- **Community volunteers-** Volunteers can be found in a plethora of places and many of those resources are listed in Part 7 of this proposal; volunteers can help to maintain garden as well as fundraise and donate gifts to the school garden.

The Garden

The layout of the garden is important, especially when dealing with special education students because it needs to be accessible to all. In order to do this, the planning will need to consider space for those who may be in wheelchairs and/or have limited mobility. This means the walkways through the garden need to be at least 36 inches wide. The ground should have no slope, is slip resistant, and easy for a wheelchair to maneuverer. Also, the garden should include raised garden beds so that it is easier to reach for those with limited mobility.

In order to generate design ideas, call a meeting with all the potential personnel to brainstorm ideas for the layout of the green space. Bring markers, colored pencils, magazines, glue sticks and paper so that the garden team can get creative and map out their ideas.

Things to consider when planning and designing a garden:

- Design accessibility- can people in wheelchairs access the garden?
- Location- How much will the plants face the sun or shade? Is the ground flat enough?
- Water- Is the planting near water sources?

Goals & Objectives

Goals

To ensure Cobb County Title 1 schools have access to on-campus gardens where students, particularly special education and inclusion students, can take part in the gardening process for horticultural therapy and life skill practices.

Objectives

1. In Cobb County, 50 percent of Title 1 schools (including at least 2 high schools) will have an on-campus garden by January 2025.
2. Each school with a garden will have a designated horticultural therapist, preferably someone already in the special education field by January 2025.
3. Each school with a garden will have a designated school gardening team and individual plan by January 2025.
4. Each school with a garden will allow their special education and inclusion students time to participate in the process from start to finish.
5. Cobb County will receive at least \$80,000 to start school gardens, with \$10,000 per Title 1 school by January 2025.

Budget

Below is a recommended approximate budget.

Item	Purpose	Total # Needed	Cost Per Item	Estimated Cost
Bags of Gardening Soil	Soil for Garden	10	\$7.97	\$79.70
Tomato Seeds	Planting Vegetables	10	\$1.59	\$15.90
Bell Pepper Seeds	Planting Vegetables	10	\$1.59	\$15.90
Cucumber Seeds	Planting Vegetables	5	\$1.79	\$8.95
Onion Seeds	Planting Vegetables	5	\$1.59	\$7.95
Bean Seeds	Planting Vegetables	5	\$0.50	\$2.50
Lumber (4ft. X 8 ft.)	To create 3 raised beds	16	\$3.97	\$63.52
Fence (15ft)	To keep animals out of vegetables	2	\$31.98	\$63.96
Hand Trowel	To dig holes for seeds	3	\$7.97	\$23.91
Rake	clean up garden once complete	1	\$25.97	\$25.97
Gloves (3 Pack)	Used while digging/planting	1	\$9.98	\$9.98
Shed	To hold garden tools	1	\$149	\$149.00
Vegetable Costumes (Combination)	Classroom education	5	\$24.25	\$121.25
Veggie Stickers	Classroom education	5	\$5.39	\$26.95
Gardening Workbook for Kids	Educational Resources	20	\$16.99	\$339.80
Snacks for 3 Volunteer Days to Create Garden		1	\$200	\$200.00
Marketing Flyer to be sent home with 350 families to promote garden	Marketing	350	0.15	\$52.50
Blueprint of Garden and Landscape		1	\$30	\$30.00
Landscape Designer	Assistance	1	\$3,500	\$3,500.00
Youth Trainer				\$0.00
Totals		452	\$4,020.68	\$4,737.74

*Image source: Brandis University <https://www.brandeis.edu/community-service/pdfs/rcclif/sample-budget-proposal.pdf>

Community Resources

Cobb Master Gardener

Since 1980, this organization has been an extension of the University of Georgia's agricultural extension program. Cobb Master Gardener has assisted over 58 schools in agricultural studies and lesson plans as well as visited K-12 schools to teach students about growing their own vegetables.

770.528.4070
678 South Cobb Drive
Suite 200
Marietta, GA 30060

Georgia Organics

This organization has a "Farm to School" program that aims to help farmers provide fresh food for K-12 schools. They provide organic farming instructions, hold lessons and seminars on farming and work closely with farmers across the state.

678.702.0400
200-A Ottley Dr.
NE Atlanta 30324

American Horticultural Therapy Association

This is the leading organization in the field of horticultural therapy. They offer horticultural therapy classes and resources to assist emerging plant therapists.

(888) 294-8527
2150 N 107th St, Ste 205
Seattle, WA 98133

School Gardening Grants

On the following link, a list of grant and funding opportunities for school gardening is provided: <https://www.slowfoodusa.org/resources-and-grants>

SCHOOL GARDEN ELA ACTIVITIES

1. Transition & Description Blossoms
2. Nature Writer
3. Bug-off Writers!
4. Flower Letters
5. Marketing Magnolia

Transition & Description Blossoms Activity

Grades: 2-8; Special Education

Duration: 2– 3.5 hrs. OR one –three class periods (depends on how much of the garden you have started).

Overview: Students will learn transitions and descriptive words while they participate in school gardening. The teacher will teach students the steps to starting a garden by showing them through hands on experience. After that, students will be asked to remember the steps and write a “how-to” garden guide using transitions. Then, students will be asked to describe the garden in a narrative story, using as many descriptive words as possible.

Objective: To teach students through gardening to use transitional and descriptive words in their informative and narrative writing.

By the end of the lesson: Students should be able to write a paragraph or a story using transitional words; have a broader vocabulary of transitional and descriptive words; use words, phrases, and clauses to clarify the relationships among claim(s) and reasons; use appropriate transitions to clarify the relationships among ideas and concepts; use precise language and domain-specific vocabulary to inform about or explain the topic; provide a concluding statement or section that follows from the information or explanation presented; know the basics of starting a garden.

ELA materials: Transition word chart, descriptive word chart, transition worksheet, descriptive worksheet, pencil, paper.

Garden materials: Area for students to sit, land for gardening OR garden beds, soil, shovel, gloves, vegetable/fruit/flower sprouts OR seeds, fertilizer (if needed), water for watering plants.

Transition & Description Blossoms Steps

Step 1: 20–30 min.

Give students a grade-appropriate classroom lesson on [transitions](#) and [descriptive writing](#) in order to introduce the concept.

Step 2: 45–60 min. (Time will vary depending on how much of the garden is already prepared) Take students outside to start [planting a garden](#) (this could possibly be the same day as Step 1 or the next day). The plants can be implanted in the ground or in a garden bed. If using a garden bed, you may want to have beds that are already made, unless you feel students would enjoy and can assist with assembling the beds. The garden beds would be particularly beneficial in making the garden more accessible.

Teach students the steps to gardening, have them take notes (if applicable) and have them participate in the gardening process.

Step 3: 30–45 min. (Time will vary depending on student levels)

Ask students to write a how-to guide on gardening. Encourage students to write as many transition words as possible or words from each section from the transition chart on the next page.

Step 4: 45–60 min.

Ask students to write a narrative essay on their experiences in the garden using as many descriptive words as possible or words from the chart.

Differentiation:

Advanced – Some students can help to make the beds; consider having a student team leader or breaking the class into separate gardening groups with each group assigned a student team leader; students may be able to write longer or more advanced how-to guides and narrative stories.

Inclusion – Some students may require a fill-in-the-blank “how-to” guide and descriptive narrative with a word bank.

Transitional Words and Phrases			English With Life
Comparison Similarly Equally Likewise In like manner Like In the same way Comparable As as As if	Time & sequence Before After Afterward Then Next First, second, .. Finally Soon later	Addition As well as And Too As well as Furthermore Also In addition to Not only - but also or	Direction and place Here There Over there Beyond Opposite Under Above To the left In the distance English With Life
Illustration Illustrated by In the case of Such as For example As an example For instance In this case For one thing	Cause and effect Therefore So Because Thus Hence Due to As a result Consequently English With Life	Contrast But However On the other hand Otherwise Unlike Conversely At the same time In spite of	Emphasis Especially Of cause Certainly Indeed In addition In particular Furthermore also

<https://www.pinterest.com/pin/756112224908744933/?!p=true>

Nature Writer Activity

Grades: All grades; Special Education

Duration: 60 min. OR one class period (possibly two depending on how much the students enjoy it).

Overview: Students will use the practice of mindfulness, a psychological process of bringing one's attention to what is happening around him/her in the present moment, to journal in the garden. This is a simple activity that requires students to meditate, pay attention to their nature surroundings and journal about how they are feeling.

Objective: To allow students low-stakes, therapeutic opportunities to write and journal; to practice mindfulness— a psychological and therapeutic exercise that will teach students to be fully aware of the present moment to reduce stress and overreaction in order to limit negative behavior, and anxiety by connecting with nature.

By the end of the lesson: Students will be able to write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences; feel calmer and less stressed through mindfulness and journaling.

ELA materials: pens and journals for each student.

Garden materials: A garden area suitable for students to journal and practice mindfulness; chairs and/or blankets students can sit on.

Nature Writer Steps

Step 1: 10–15 min.

In the classroom, prepare students for what they will be doing—journaling in the garden and practicing mindfulness. Introduce them to the concept of [mindfulness](#) and let them know how it will benefit them.

Step 2: 5–10 min.

Bring students outdoors to the garden area and instruct them to be silent, focus on their thoughts and walk around the garden area. Tell students to concentrate on the current moment and think about “walking mindfully.” Ask students to pay attention to how their feet are touching the ground and the muscles in their legs as they stroll. Ask students to consider the quote from spiritual leader, Thich Nhat Hanh, “walk as if you are kissing the Earth with your feet.”

Step 3: 5– 10 min.

Ask students to then, quietly find a seat. Tell them to look up at the clouds and focus on how it makes them feel in that moment.

Step 4: 5 min.

While students are still sitting, tell them to focus on breath. One of the biggest aspects of mindfulness and meditation is learning how to breathe. Tell students to breathe in happiness and positivity and breathe out all their worries.

Step 5: 20 min.

Tell students to free write all their thoughts in that current moment. To help, they can focus on their 5 senses. Tell student's not to worry about it if the writing is not perfect or if they make a "mistake". Tell them not to erase anything and just continue to write. Let them know all their feelings are valid and to pour it out on the page.

Differentiation:

Advanced- Students can write for longer periods

Inclusion- Have "mood cards" and/or "I feel" statement guides for students to use to help them better discuss their feelings. You can also provide some students with a chart with all the 5 senses on it and have them fill out what they see, taste, touch, hear, and smell.

Bug-off Writers Activity

Grades: 4-8; Special Education

Duration: 3 – 4 class days

Overview: Students will learn the ins and outs of pesticides— products used to control or kill bugs, weeds, mold and other unwanted organisms in the garden and make their own organic pesticide. Then, students will be asked to create a large chart of unwanted writing practices and bad habits that they should "kill" or get rid of when they write.

Objective: To teach and remind students about unwanted writing habits so they can learn to use better writing practices in their work; teach how to make organic pesticides; teach pesticides and how it works to kill and control bugs and other pests.

By the end of the lesson: Students should be able to know and name common writing mistakes; engage effectively in a range of collaborative discussions (one-on-one, in groups, and teacher-led) with diverse partners; practice interpreting information presented in diverse formats; understand the use of and how pesticides work; experience making organic/natural pesticides.

ELA materials: Large bulletin board sized paper, markers, colored pencils.

Garden materials: There are [several options](#) of pesticides students may use. The video provided will offer recipe instructions.

Option #1

½ diced cups of hot peppers
 ½ diced cups of garlic OR
 onion OR a mixture of both
 ½ liter of warm water
 1 blender
 1 large glass jar
 1 strainer

Option # 2

15 ml. of neem oil
 ½ tbs. of mild soap
 2 liters. of warm water

Option #3

2 oranges (will use peels only)
 2 cups of boiling water + pot
 A few drops of castor soap
 (preferably peppermint
 flavored)
 1 large bowl/jar
 1 strainer, 1 squirt bottle

Bug-off Writers Steps**Step 1:** 60 min (or one class period)

In the classroom, teach students about [common writing mistakes](#). Explain to them what they are, why they are incorrect, and how to fix them. Then, have them practice on their own using worksheets.

Step 2: 60 min. (or one class period)

Transition from STEP 1 by explaining to students that just like there are writing mistakes to get rid of, there are also things to also get rid of in the garden like bugs, weeds, rodents and molds. Then, teach the students about [pesticides](#) and how it's used to kill or control the pests. Teach them about the difference between pesticides with chemicals and the organic/natural option they will make.

Step 3: 60 min. (or one class period)

Have class in the garden. Tell students they will make their own pesticides. You can choose to have students break up into groups and make the pesticides together or you can choose to make it yourself in front of the class and call on volunteers to assist you. If they are able, making the pesticides in groups may be helpful if the garden is larger in size so that there are enough pesticides to go around. Also, if working in groups, it may be helpful to print the instructions out and hand per group.

Because some of the pesticides require them to sit a full day before use, you can have the students create the mixture, let it sit in the sun for 24 hours and then move onto STEP 4. If not, you can have a ready-made mixture that students can use right away, but still allow them to go through the motions of making the pesticides.

Step 4:

In the same class period as STEP 3, have students' partner in groups and write on the large bulletin board paper the common writing mistakes. Allow them to make it colorful and artsy and tell them it will hang on the wall, serving as a reminder to "bug-off" and not use these writing mistakes in their work.

Differentiation:

Advanced- have students be the group teams' leaders; have students provide their own examples of the mistakes and correct them.

Inclusion- Option #2 may be the less challenging option for the pesticides so this will be helpful for students who need more assistance; consider each group make a different pesticide; some students may need a word-bank of writing mistakes and that can be provided to them while they work on the bulletin board paper.

Flower Letters Activity

Grades: All grades; Special Education

Duration: 1-2 weeks

Overview: Students will make greeting cards, decorated with flowers from the school garden. Students will then learn the basics of letter writing and write a letter to parents (or people of your choosing--i.e., other teachers, school garden donors, etc.)

Objective: To allow students opportunities to be crafty and express creativity using the school garden/nature, to teach letter writing.

By the end of the lesson: produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience; write routinely over extended time frames (time for research, reflection, and revision) and shorter time frames (a single sitting or a day or two) for a range of discipline-specific tasks, purposes, and audiences.

Ela materials: wax paper, paint brushes, scissors, tweezers, glue, paper (acid-free, watercolor or any other paper that is thicker than standard paper).

Garden materials: A handful of flower pieces, leaves, stems and other parts of flowers per each student, gloves per each student, flower press OR heavy books.

Flower Letters Steps

Step 1: 20–30 min.

Teach students [letter writing](#) (This example is geared toward elementary students. Older students or high school students may not need this or may need a refresher). Determine who the letters are for and this would be an appropriate time to teach “understanding audience.”

Step 2: 30 min.

Explain to students they will make pressed flower cards with their new letter-writing knowledge. Allow students to go outside and collect a bag full of flowers. Use gloves.

Step 3: 1–2 weeks

Follow instructions on how to make [pressed flower cards](#) or [here](#). This will be a 1–2-week process. It involves drying out the flowers, then pressing them for a week or two.

Step 4: 30 min.

While the flowers are pressing, tell students to draft a version of their letter. Once the draft is approved, then have them transcribe it onto their folded greeting card paper.

Step 5: 45 min.

Once the flowers are fully pressed/dried, allow students to design their card. Once finished, mail them off.

Differentiation:

Advanced- Students can write longer letters, have students write ‘thank you’ letters to school garden donors, volunteers and other supporters

Inclusion- Student may write letter to parent or favorite teacher, students may work in groups/pairs to create one card per group/pair

Marketing Marigolds Activity

Grades: All grades (though grades 6-12 may be most appropriate); Special Education

Duration: 4-6 weeks (more time may be needed, depending on how extensive you want the project to be).

Overview: Students will make marketing material for the school garden.

Objective: To allow students opportunities to create real-world writing experiences; to teach elements of marketing and writing for businesses and organizations; to generate funding and spread awareness of the school garden.

By the end of the lesson: Students will be able to produce marketing material; with some guidance and support from peers and adults, develop and strengthen writing as needed by planning, revising, editing, rewriting, or trying a new approach; produce clear and coherent writing in which the development, organization, and style are appropriate to task, purpose, and audience; write informative/explanatory texts to examine a topic and convey ideas, concepts, and information through the selection, organization, and analysis of relevant content.

ELA materials: Microsoft Word, phone/video camera for video and photo content, social media platforms, design software like Adobe InDesign (optional).

Garden materials: A school garden

Marketing Marigolds Steps

Step 1: 4 weeks

Teach students marketing concepts, tools and strategies and decide as a class on a marketing project students can create to engage donors, increase school garden volunteers and/or spread awareness of the garden. Have 2–3 groups of students so 2 or 3 final projects will result. Students will need to write marketing material using Microsoft Word, but can choose to use social media marketing with a mixture of video and photos to add to the marketing content

Step 2: 2 weeks

Have students work on final drafts of their material.

Differentiation:

Advanced- students can use software like Adobe InDesign, Final Cut, or other design tools may research and contact possible donors.

Inclusion- students may be able to create handmade garden arts and crafts to send to donors, students may be able to take pictures or hold the video camera if unable to write much, allow all students to work in areas of their strength.

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